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THOSE GIRLS

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BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AUTHOR OF

"ARMY TALES," "BOOTLE'S BABY," "CAVALRY LIFE," "REGIMENTAL LEGENDS," ETC.

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THOSE GIRLS.

CHAPTER I.

MISFORTUNE.

"When you are an anvil, bear. When you are a hammer, strike!"

"BETTY MCKENZIE," said a girl's voice.

"Yes," said Betty, looking round in a dreamy kind of way.

"I say, Betty, Madame wants you. There's something up; Madame is in such a passion, a towering passion—she looks as if she was going to eat you."

"Oh, no," said Betty, easily.

She rose from her seat beside the window, which

was wide open—a pleasant window it was, overlooking the lovely Avenue Louise in Brussels—and put down the bit of embroidery on which she had been occupied.

"I don't think Madame will eat me," she said, quietly; "you are so fanciful, Helen, always making a mountain out of a mole-hill. However, I will go and see what is the matter with her."

She gave a glance at herself in the small square of dingy looking-glass, saw that her pretty golden hair was tidy, and that her gown was in order. She was a pretty girl—no, she was something more than pretty, for she was lovely; quite fair in complexion, with hair that was of a deep reddish gold, without being either smooth or in any way tousled. She was laughing a little at the idea of Madame having any desire to eat her, and it was with the traces of that charming smile still upon her mouth, that she left the room and went down the bare and rather steep stairs to the private sitting-room of Madame Le Brun, who was the

head of the large and important establishment wherein Betty McKenzie was a pupil. A sharp voice bade her enter.

"You sent for me, Madame," said Betty, still without any trace of fear about her.

"I did send for you," said Madame Le Brun, very coldly. "You will be good enough to stand there in the light of the window, where I can see you. I suppose you can guess what I want with you?"

"Not in the least, Madame," said Betty, without embarrassment.

"Oh!—then I will enlighten you. I—have—found—you—out," she said, fixing Betty with a pair of steely eyes. She spoke in English, the English of an Englishwoman, for such in truth she was, being only a Belgian in name. "I have found you out," she repeated, sternly. "Ah, I see you start," which in truth Betty did; "it is no wonder. I would like to know what you have to say for yourself?"

"Madame," said Betty, "I have nothing to say

for myself; I do not even know what you are talking about."

"Then I will enlighten you," said Madame Le Brun, with a tragic air. "You have been receiving letters while under my roof and under my charge, from a young man—from a young man, I said, but I do not know whether he is old or young; it is immaterial. You have been receiving letters from a man. One of these letters has fallen into my hands this morning. I see that you do not deny it."

"I have no wish to deny it," said Betty calmly, though she had grown very white and was trembling visibly.

"You are sixteen," said Madame, speaking in a clear, cold, cutting voice, "you are of good family, you have a devoted mother, who has always done everything to forward your welfare that lay within her power, you are here in the society of ladies, in the house of a woman of high standing and of the highest repute, you are supposed—although perhaps it has not been as clearly laid down to you

as would have been the case had you been of less good family—you are supposed to set a good example to your sister, who is three years younger than yourself, you are supposed to keep some faith with the widowed mother who supports you, and you are supposed to keep some faith with *me*. You have not done any of these things. You have indulged in a low, clandestine, vulgar intrigue, such as makes me blush for you still. I will give you one chance, before I break your mother's heart, to retrieve that which I have found out this morning."

During all this time the girl remained perfectly silent. She had grown white to her very lips; her eyes, blue on ordinary occasions, were almost black with fear and anxiety; her fingers trembled so that she instinctively hid them in the folds of her gown.

"I will give you one more chance," Madame went on pitilessly, "of hiding this wretched story forever. That you will give up to me the name of the man who wrote this letter—he is not enough

of a man to sign his name in full. You will also tell me the name of the person or persons who assisted you to receive this clandestine correspondence, and you will swear to me on your sacred word of honor, that so long as you live, you will never hold communication in any shape or form with this man again. On those conditions, and on those alone, I will give you the chance of retrieving the character which you have lost. If you do not obey me in this, I shall telegraph to your mother immediately, and I shall lay the whole story before her."

"I will not obey you," said Betty deliberately; "you ask what is impossible."

"Why is it impossible?" the schoolmistress demanded.

"Because," said Betty, "I would rather die than betray those who have done wrong for my sake. I have had the misfortune to be found out, and I will abide by the consequences of what I have done; but I will not tell you how that letter came into my hands, and I will not tell you who wrote

it. For the rest, you may do what you like and how you like."

"Do you defy me?" said Madame, angrily.

"No, Madame," said Betty, "I do not wish to defy you, but I will not tell you how I got that letter or who wrote it."

"Then," said Madame, "you leave me no choice but to treat you as a prisoner, and to acquaint your mother with the whole story. You will remain in the little room which is through my bedroom."

Betty instinctively gave a shudder at the prospect which lay before her, for the room through Madame's bedroom was lighted only by a skylight, and had no other means of egress than by the door into Madame's room. It was Madame's habit on those rare occasions when one or other of her young charges was too refractory for ordinary means, to incarcerate them in this room. It had no window save the skylight in the roof, from which you could see nothing but a limited view of the blue sky of heaven above, and moreover it was Madame's practice to lock the door of her own bedroom, so

that communication with the prisoner was simply a matter of impossibility.

"You will remain there, you will hold communication with nobody, you will see nobody except myself until the arrival of your mother."

She rang the bell and, in a few minutes, had issued her orders preparatory to Betty's imprisonment.

"Take Mademoiselle Betty's bedding and toilet necessaries into the room leading out of my bedroom," she said, to the servant, who answered the summons; "make up the bed and prepare the room for occupation. Let me know when it is ready." Then she turned sharply to Betty. "You are too near the window there, go and stand by the piano."

Now the girl, although she knew that a veritable martyrdom lay before her, knew also that it was more than useless to disobey, and she went proudly across the room, standing in the bay of the grand piano.

"I shall take care that you have everything

necessary for your health, until your mother arrives," Madame said, in a pitiless voice. "When she reaches Brussels, which I think she will do as soon as possible after the receipt of my telegram, I shall lay the whole disgraceful story before her, and leave her to deal with you as she thinks most fit. If this letter," tapping the paper which she held in her hand, "were more explicit, I could myself have confronted this young man; but, you foolish child, do you not see how carefully he abstains from committing himself on paper, do you not understand that this marriage that he speaks of would never have taken place, once he had got you from under the shelter of this roof? Some day, Betty McKenzie, ill-used as no doubt you think yourself now, you will be thankful to me for having been the means of stopping you from this ill-advised and foolish step which you were about to take, and you will be more thankful to Providence for having made me so."

"Madame, I did not say that I felt myself ill-used," said Betty, boldly, yet with no air of audacity.

"From your point of view, you are perfectly right in all that you are doing."

"I am sorry for your mother," said Madame, sitting down with her back towards the girl.

"I hope, Madame," said Betty, respectfully, "that you will not think it necessary to alarm my mother. Telegrams are alarming things at the best of times—do you not think it will do just as well to write as to telegraph? I don't mind being a couple of days longer in prison."

"Child," said Madame Le Brun, turning round and regarding Betty with grave eyes, "frankly speaking, you appall me. It is incredible to me that you can be so altered, so absolutely dead to all feeling of shame, as you seem to be now."

"Madame," said Betty, "I am not ashamed of what I have done."

"Then why," retorted Madame, "have you done it in secret?"

"Because," said the girl, "I am two years younger than most girls are considered old enough to be married. I have not acted in any hurry; I

have thought everything out quietly and deliberately. I love the man who wrote that letter to me; I shall never love another man as long as I live; I believe in him and I trust him. He is as incapable of playing me false, as I am myself of betraying a trust. I was going to take the law into my own hands, but circumstances or fate have been too many for me, and I must needs submit now to those who have power over me for the present. But I am not ashamed, Madame; I have done nothing to be ashamed of."

"Well, I will not argue with you," said the schoolmistress with dignity. "If you are not ashamed of yourself, I am ashamed for you; indeed, Betty, I am ashamed of you."

She put up her hand with a gesture indicating that the conversation was at an end, and drawing a telegraph form towards her she began to write the message, which was to convey to the girl's mother that something dreadful had happened at No. 00 Avenue Louise, Brussels.

I beg of you to come to Brussels without the delay

of a moment. No one is ill but something very grave has happened with which I must acquaint you personally as soon as possible.

So the message ran and, when she had read it over, Madame once more rang the bell. The same servant answered it.

"Françine," said Madame, "did you give my instructions about the inner room?"

"I did, Madame," Françine replied.

"Then immediately send this message to the post-office. I do not know what it will cost, but here is a twenty-franc piece with which to defray the expense."

"Certainly, Madame," replied Françine, and immediately disappeared.

A quarter of an hour or so later, and her maid came to say that the inner room was ready.

"Thank you," said Madame Le Brun, then turned to Betty. "Come," she said, in a peremptory tone.

Now Betty had never before seen the interior of that dreadful room. She had been in Madame's

bedroom on occasions, when that lady happened to be dressing for the evening or when suffering from some indisposition, but she had never penetrated into that other inner apartment, which was looked upon in the establishment as the very last resource for coping with undue wickedness and rebellion. She could not help shuddering a little as she crossed the portal, it was so cold, so cheerless. Not a picture on the dull gray walls, not a touch of beauty from one end of the apartment to the other. A little iron bedstead stood in one corner, destitute of hangings and of draperies, a washstand and a bath occupied another corner, a small square of carpet was laid in the centre of the room and a small square of looking glass—even more cheap and dingy than is usual with looking glasses in Belgium, which is saying a good deal—hung against the wall. Beneath it there was a square table on which lay an English and a foreign Bible. There were two chairs, perfectly uncompromising in their unpadded straightness; and there was a crucifix. There were three pegs fixed to the back

of the door, and of other furnishings and decorations there were none.

"Here," said Madame, with a wave of her hand round the room, "you will remain until your mother arrives. You will see nobody but myself except when the maid comes to arrange your room, when I shall always be present. You need not attempt to hold any communication with the outer world; it will be impossible. By-the-bye," she said abruptly, turning back as she was about to leave the room, "let me see what you have in your pockets."

The girl turned perfectly scarlet from chin to brow, but she had made up her mind to submit to all the lesser commands and humiliations which might fall to her lot, and she uncomplainingly and in silence emptied her pockets on to the little table. There was nothing of any importance—a letter from one of her sisters, which Madame glanced over and laid down on to the table again, a purse containing a few francs in silver and one gold

piece, a lead-pencil, and a pocket-knife, both of which Madame appropriated.

"Give me your brooch," said Madame Le Brun, when she had satisfied herself that Betty's pocket contained nothing either dangerous or amusing. "Now take down your hair and plait it into one long braid."

The girl obeyed without a word, taking down coil after coil until her shoulders were hidden by a shining red gold cloud. It was fine and silky hair that curled naturally, and being very long, fell into great waves of exceeding beauty. She deftly plaited it into a long braid, which reached far below her waist. Madame, meantime, made her own of the hairpins.

"I shall bring you your meals myself," she said, coldly. "The door of my bedroom will be locked, so that you cannot make anybody hear, however you call or shout. You can make nobody hear through the skylight, for no other windows look on to it, so it will be useless for you to attempt to communicate with the outer world in that way.

I am sorry to take all these precautions, but you yourself have made them absolutely imperative. I now leave you to your own thoughts and to the contemplation of the dreadful position in which you have placed yourself. Before I go, is there anything that you have to say to me?"

"Not a word," said Betty quietly.

"Very good," said Madame, "then I have nothing further to say."

She went out of the room, shutting the door behind her. Betty heard the key turn in the lock, heard Madame moving about her own room, then heard her open the outer door, pass out, shut it, and lock it behind her.

It is almost impossible to describe the feeling of intense loneliness that came over the girl's heart, as she realized that she was now absolutely cut off from her small world. She knew that all her plans for the future had been brought to an untimely end, she knew that because of her loyalty she had put herself in the way of winning the most intense disgrace and the most severe punishment

that could be meted out to her. She put her hand into her half-emptied pocket and drew out her handkerchief.

"No, I will not cry," she exclaimed, forcing the tears back from her eyes, "I will not cry; after all, things might be worse. I have told nothing, betrayed no one, and although that silly woman has taken away my penknife and my hairpins, lest I should put an end to myself, she has not taken away my love nor my greatest treasure." And then she tore open her dress taking out a locket, hanging round her neck by a fine gold chain. "Oh, Dick, Dick, my darling," she cried, "how will you ever know why I did not keep my promise? Oh, Dick, I don't know when I shall see you again, but, if I wait till the end of all time, you will be worth waiting for, dear, and *I—will—wait.*"

And then she sank upon her knees by the little bare bed, sobbing over the pictured face in the locket, as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER II.

A THUNDERBOLT.

"Trust no secrets to a friend which, if repeated, would bring infamy."

For about two years Mrs. McKenzie had lived at the Rosary, near Blankhampton. The Rosary was a pretty river-side residence about half a mile from the River House and about a mile and a half from the town. It was a house rather above the average in Blankhampton, though not quite what you would call a country mansion; that is to say, it was a large and spacious villa, standing in charming gardens, with a good tennis ground and with more stable accommodation than Mrs. McKenzie had actual need of.

For eight or ten years after the death of her husband, Mrs. McKenzie had lived abroad, partly

because with all her children at school, she had not cared to keep up an expensive establishment, and partly for the sake of her daughters' education. But when Rosa was nineteen and had freely tasted the gayeties both of Paris and Brussels, Mrs. McKenzie began to think it was high time that she made a permanent home, to which all her girls would come when their education was finished.

Well, after much consideration and much consultation with Rosa, Mrs. McKenzie finally decided upon taking the Rosary, at Blankhampton.

"You see, dear," she said to Rosa, when they had decided that they would make their home in England, "you see, dear, it is all very well being abroad for a time, but with you four girls I have to think of the future, and I am never able to forget that your dear father had an insuperable objection to foreigners. It would be a very great grief to me, if any one of you were to marry a foreigner, because of that objection and because I believe that there is no husband like an English one, and of course you are nineteen, dear, and, though I don't want

to flatter you, at the same time, you are very good-looking, and it stands to common sense that you will marry sooner or later. I would so much rather that you and your sisters should marry Englishmen. Well now, I have just a thousand a year, and although a thousand a year is quite an affluent income for Brussels or even for Paris, and I have not really spent anything like that for years past, at the same time a thousand a year is nothing of an income on which to live in London and maintain a good position. I could not possibly keep a carriage nor a house of any pretension ; while if we go into the suburbs, we become mere suburban people at once, which I could not endure. But, if we go to Blankhampton, which many people tell me is quite a gay place, in the midst of a very good country set, we can have as good a position, with three maids and a smart little cart, as if we had five thousand a year. It all depends on your introductions."

" Well, mother, then go to Blankhampton," said Rosa, sensibly.

And eventually, Mrs. McKenzie and Rosa went down to Blankhampton, where they fell in love with the Rosary. It was not a house of extravagant price, in truth it was but eighty pounds a year; but it was roomy, it had a long and charming drawing-room, a good dining-room, a dear little morning-room, and one of the best tennis-grounds in the neighborhood; and although it had stabling for four horses, in other respects it was not at all too large for Mrs. McKenzie's ultimate requirements.

In due time, the house was renovated and done up for the new-comers, and two ladies spent a good deal of time in the principal furniture shop at Blankhampton, choosing carpets and furniture; but it was only furniture of an ordinary description, for Mrs. McKenzie had, on the death of her husband, put by all her favorite belongings, her pictures, china, silver, some almost priceless pieces of brocade and embroideries, and a few articles of old Chippendale or Sheraton furniture, such as made the very mouth of the Blankhampton upholsterer, to

whom she entrusted the care of repolishing them, water.

And when Mrs. McKenzie had put her house in order, she set about procuring letters of introduction to the best people worth knowing in the neighborhood—the Bishop, the Dean, the General commanding the District, and Lady Lucifer were the people that she, to use a very ordinary modern phrase, "went for." And in due time, Mrs. McKenzie became as fashionable in Blankhampton as even Mrs. Trafford had been in her day.

Now, although the neighborhood of Blankhampton received Mrs. McKenzie with open arms, it cannot be said that Blankhampton itself did so. Mrs. McKenzie with one daughter, Blankhampton pure and simple did not so much mind; but Mrs. McKenzie, with three other daughters in the background, was a very different person; and as the four McKenzie girls were all strikingly good-looking, Blankhampton resented the fact, as though red gold hair and violet eyes were a studied insult to itself.

In course of time Gwendoline, the second girl,

left school and began to go into society like her sister. Mrs. McKenzie herself was still a very handsome woman, barely twenty years Rosa's senior. The two eldest daughters were high-spirited, energetic girls, with plenty of dash and go about them, looking well in everything they wore, doing everything that they attempted thoroughly well, able to turn their handsome hands to anything, as clever at picking up a new dance as they were at skating a new figure, and with hands as deft at trimming a hat or furbishing up a ball gown as they were at playing a piano or setting a dinner-table. And Blankhampton resented the advent of what it called "those girls" most deeply.

Well, it was towards the end of February. The winter had been a rather hard one and skating had been quite the order of the day. Blankhampton had been unusually gay. The Cavalry officers had given a carnival, and the Infantry officers had got up an afternoon dance, and the General's staff had given a small evening one. Lady Lucifer had had a house full of people, and

now that the frost had given way, and nice soft hunting weather had set in, the engagement list of the family at the Rosary was quite a full and a very interesting one.

It happened on the very morning on which poor Betty, over in her school at Brussels, had been condemned to durance vile, the three ladies were assembled over a rather late breakfast, after a ball of unusual brilliancy the previous evening in the Blankhampton Assembly Rooms.

"Tired, Gwen?" asked Mrs. McKenzie, as her second daughter appeared.

"Not a bit, mother, thank you, I enjoyed myself too much to be tired. I *did* enjoy myself."

"Yes, I should think you did," cried Rosa. "I saw half the girls in the town glaring at you. How very odd it is that they are always so furious when one has a good time; I'm sure I don't see the good of going to a dance unless one does. If I went to a dance only to be glued to the wall," Miss McKenzie continued, with a superior air, "I would much rather stop at home."

"Ah, but," said Gwendoline, with a laugh, "nobody ever goes to a ball *expecting* to be glued to the wall. One would always hope for better luck next time."

"Yes, I daresay one would hope," said Rosa, with superb disdain.

"Well, now, I always remain glued to the wall," said Mrs. McKenzie smiling.

"Ah, but," cried Rosa, quickly, "that's from a matter of choice, not of necessity. It doesn't matter when one *chooses* to do a thing, it is when one is *obliged* to do it that the rub comes."

"I daresay, I daresay. Well, I have enjoyed myself very much in my time," said the mother, smiling tranquilly, "and I don't know that one wants to go on enjoying one's self just in the same way forever. It is enjoyment enough for me to see you two having a really delightful time."

"Well, then, mother," cried Gwen, "you must be the happiest woman in Blankhampton."

"I believe I am," said Mrs. McKenzie compla-

cently. "But tell me, dears, what are you thinking of doing to-day?"

"Well, to-day," said Rosa, "we promised to drive over to Matcham. Lady Lucifer has got a little tea-party on. She said that she would tell you about it, that it was quite an impromptu affair, just got up during the evening, and that she would particularly ask you to come. Didn't she?"

"No, I only nodded to her; I never spoke to her."

"Oh, well, I suppose she knew we should tell you. You will go, won't you?"

"No, I don't think so," said Mrs. McKenzie, "you girls can go without me. I have promised Mrs. French that I would go in and have that bodice fitted on, and, as I really want it, I cannot very well disappoint her."

"Then you will want the trap," said Rosa.

"Not at all. I shall walk in and take a cab out. You go off to your tea-party and just tell Lady Lucifer that I couldn't come—you needn't

tell her what I am doing, she'll be satisfied enough if you go."

The two girls were very busy that morning, making themselves smart little red hats to match the red silk waistcoats that they were to wear that day. So they brought their stitching down into the morning-room and worked away as merry as robins, leaving off now and then to go into the conservatory, which opened out of the morning-room, leading again into the drawing-room, where their mother was hard at work.

Mrs. McKenzie's conservatory was her hobby, she loved every leaf and flower which it contained, or so the girls said. She knew when the big india-rubber plant in the corner was going to shoot a new leaf, or, as she put it, have a new baby. She was on the watch lest the tall castor-oil plant in the other corner should get what she called the scab; she duly and truly washed the faces of many of the large-leafed plants and snipped off the edges of the big palms when they began to turn brown. She knew when to cut, when to

prune, when to water, when to weed, when to repot, she knew everything about conservatory work. Her ferns were a joy and a delight, and her creeping things against the wall burst out periodically into a blaze of glory.

So the tranquil and innocent morning slipped over. The little red toques with their bit of gold embroidery showing here and there, proved to be a complete success, and Mrs. McKenzie was unusually jubilant over a new baby that was budding from a fine spikey palm, by which she set great store. The well-mannered maid announced that luncheon was served and the mother and daughters laughed and joked over it, as merrily as if they had been a large party instead of being but three. And then, just as Mrs. McKenzie was about to leave the house to walk into Blankhampton, and while the girls were still toasting their feet over the comfortable fire, preparatory to making themselves smart to go to Lady Lucifer's tea party, there came a sharp ring at the bell, followed by a doubled knock, twice repeated.

"A telegram!" cried Gwen.

Mrs. McKenzie looked up in anticipation that was scarcely that of alarm, and when Nelson entered the room bringing the little flame-colored missive with her, she took it, scarcely expecting that it was for herself. It was, however, merely addressed, "McKenzie, The Rosary, Blankhampton," and she tore open the envelope. As her eyes fell upon the word "Brussels" at the top she cried, "Oh!" in a sharp tone of surprise, eagerly devouring the contents with wide open eyes.

"*I beg you to come to Brussels without the delay of a moment,*" she read aloud, in a tone of the utmost astonishment. "*No one is ill, but something very grave has happened with which I must acquaint you personally as soon as possible.*"

For a moment after she had finished reading, there was dead silence. Then the mother turned a scared and whitened face upon her daughters and said, in a voice scarce above a whisper, "What does this mean—what can have happened?"

"Madame Le Brun," said Gwen, "is not a woman to send such a telegram, unless it was necessary. Of that I am certain." And as Gwen had been at school for several years at the big house in the Avenue Louise, the mother's heart sank lower still, for she felt that there was truth in what the girl said.

"I think she might have been more explicit," cried Rosa McKenzie, vexedly.

"I daresay she thought of the money," returned Gwen; "she's a frugal soul, you know."

"Oh yes, but in a matter like this—but there, she has said no more, and talking will not alter it," exclaimed Mrs. McKenzie. "What ought I to do—what had I better do—must I start at once—shall I take the five o'clock train to town and get across to-night—can I get across to-night?"

"No," answered Rosa; "I don't think you can go across to-night by either route; but if you go up by that train you can sup and sleep in town, and get off in comfort by the early day mail in

the morning. The question is, mother dear, will you go alone or shall one of us go with you?"

"I think I would rather go alone," said Mrs. McKenzie, in a quavering voice. "You see she says distinctly that nobody is ill, so you will not be wanted for nursing or anything of that kind. I suppose that something dreadful has happened to one of the children; she would never have sent for me like this, except out of the most dire necessity. And if it is something that we shall want to hide from the world, it will be better that nobody here knows that I have gone to Brussels at all. Listen to me, children, I will pack a few things in a bag now, I will go straight into the town and get my dress tried on, then I will get a cup of tea at Bonner's and will go up to town by the five o'clock train. Do you go to your tea-party and do not breathe a word, unless I am distinctly asked for, when you can say I have gone up to London for a few days. Say that I have gone on business: make any reasonable real-sounding excuse that you like, but tell no one of

my having gone to Brussels. I will let you know, as soon as I get there, what is the matter. I can't think what it is, this mystery is dreadful; I wish really that it were illness, rather than this dreadful suspense. What can have happened? It must be something to one of the children."

"You forget, mother," said Rosa, quietly, "that Betty is no longer a child, that Betty is a beautiful young woman."

"You don't mean——" cried Mrs. McKenzie, looking at her daughter with anxious eyes.

"Yes, I do," said Rosa. "Take my word for it, Madame has found Betty out in a love affair!"

CHAPTER III.

SUSPENSE.

"Stony limits cannot hold love out.
And what love can do, that dares love attempt."

WHEN Mrs. McKenzie had once decided what to do she lost no time in making her preparations for her journey to Brussels.

"I am going up to town for a few days," she said to Nelson, "I have had to go rather unexpectedly. Put me together enough things for a week. That dress will do, and give me that violet tea-gown; that is nice and warm. I will wear my sealskin coat for the journey, and this dress," touching her gown of black serge, "and the little red bonnet. Yes, that will do beautifully. Put me

up enough linen and necessaries of that kind for a week."

"Will you drive down to the station in the trap, ma'am, or shall I get you a cab?" Nelson asked.

"You had better get me a cab," answered Mrs. McKenzie, with as careless an air as she could assume, "because the young ladies are going over to Matcham and may as well have the trap."

"And what time does your train go, ma'am?" asked Nelson.

"Oh, I am not going till five o'clock. I have to go into Mrs. French's to have a dress fitted, so as soon as you have packed my bag and got me a cab, I will go."

She had also, although she did not think it necessary to tell the servant that, to go to the bank and get some money.

"I will leave you a check," she said to the girls, whom she found still in the morning-room, "I will leave you a check and you can get it cashed in the town in the morning. I shall take as much money as I want. And, whatever you do,

remember, not a word about my having gone to Brussels."

"Oh, we won't say a word, mother," cried the two girls, in a breath.

They were not seriously impressed by the news just received from Madame. They knew by experience that she was what they called "death" on anything like a flirtation, and, if the truth be told, they pitied Betty with all their hearts.

"I wonder," said Rosa to Gwen, when they had seen Mrs. McKenzie safely into her cab and were watching it go down the drive, "I wonder if she has shut Betty up in that room?"

"Poor Betty," said Gwen, in accents of very real commiseration.

"Madame is so silly about that sort of thing," Rosa remarked, with superb disdain. "Do you remember what a fuss she made when I had a letter from that little officer—little Hook-nose?"

"Oh, yes, rather—of course, I do. Why, you were shut up for two days. She threatened to send for mother then."

"And she would have done it too, if I had not given in and eaten humble pie," said Rosa, with a laugh. "I suppose Betty wouldn't do that, but I don't see the use of being high-minded to one's school-mistress myself—just as well give in, for peace and quietness' sake. And, of course, one didn't mean to *marry* little Hook-nose—was it likely? Very stupid to send for mother like that, I call it—just as if she could not manage her school without calling in girls' mothers to help her, foolish old thing."

So they were not the least impressed at the departure of their mother, nor alarmed at the nature of her errand. But Mrs. McKenzie herself, who was jolting along towards the town in a somewhat tumble-down cab, was in an exceedingly uncomfortable state of mind. You see *she* had not been at school with Madame Le Brun, or possibly she would have taken the summons as tranquilly as her two elder daughters had done.

It was not exactly a little expedition such as one would choose to take for pleasure at the end of

February, that is to say to make a journey beginning five hours from London and ending at Brussels; and the prospect of it very much appalled the poor woman, who knew not what trouble might meet her at the end of her journey. She, however, was a woman of much force of character, and it never occurred to her to put off the visit to the dressmaker, on which she had decided earlier in the day.

She went straight to Mrs. French's, stood patiently while her dress was fitted, told her as carelessly as she could that she was going to town for a few days and would leave Blankhampton by the five o'clock train. First she went to the bank, then to a couple of other shops where she had need to call, and, finally, went into the good Bonner's and ordered herself some tea and a hot muffin. Madame's telegram had rather taken her appetite away, but she compelled herself not only to eat the muffin but also a very dainty and delicate sandwich, and by five o'clock she was sitting in a comfortable

corner of the railway carriage, which was to take her to London.

She did not reach London till a few minutes past ten o'clock, when she went straight into the hotel adjoining the station, to whose manager she had telegraphed ordering a room and supper to be ready for her. Then she went to bed hoping to sleep, and, at all events, to await with what patience she might command, the time for continuing her journey.

It was already evening when she found herself in Brussels, gay, pretty Brussels, with its rows and rows of twinkling lights, its hundreds of cheerful tinkling bells, and its pleasant good-humored people. It was the first time that Mrs. McKenzie had ever entered Brussels with a really sad heart. She quickly chartered a cab and drove to No. 00 Avenue Louise, which was well lighted up, and, when the door opened to admit her, seemed to be full of cheerful and busy sounds.

Madame Le Brun came immediately into the cosy little *salon* into which she was shown.

"Oh, Mrs. McKenzie!" she cried, "I am so sorry to have to send for you like this; you will never know the trouble and grief that this affair has been to me."

"I don't know what you mean, Madame!" Mrs. McKenzie cried, impatiently. "What affair? Remember, I am in total ignorance of what has happened—I only know that nobody is ill. I have suffered tortures since I left Blankhampton, pray keep me in suspense no longer—tell me the worst at once. It is Betty of course."

"Yes, it is Betty," said Madame Le Brun in reply. "I assure you, Mrs. McKenzie, it has come like a thunderbolt upon me. I had no idea that one of my young ladies was capable of a course of action so utterly deceitful or so terribly bold. I made the discovery only yesterday morning——"

"But *what* discovery did you make?" asked Mrs. McKenzie, anxiously.

"Well, to put it briefly, that Betty has been carrying on an intrigue with a man."

"I expected as much," said Mrs. McKenzie, in what she could not help being a tone of relief.

"It has been going on for weeks apparently," Madame continued, "for this letter, which I happened to intercept, is evidently one of a series—not a short series either. Here it is, read it for yourself; you will then understand what my state of mind has been."

Now, as a matter of fact, Mrs. McKenzie cared nothing at all as to the state of Madame's mind, what she cared about was the state of her daughter's health and behavior. However, she took the letter, and with astonished eyes, read it. It was dated but there was no address:

"My Dearest Sweetheart," it began, "I returned last night from England, where, as I promised I would do, I made every arrangement for our marriage. As you are not of age, I find that it will be absolutely necessary, short of perjuring one's self, which it would be impossible for us to do, to be married by banns. I have therefore put them up at a little church about twenty miles from London,

of which a great friend of mine is vicar. He practically knows everything and urges me very strongly to go to your mother and explain the whole situation and our wishes to her. But I feel that that course is practically impossible—I feel it even more than I did—the truth is, I dare not let my uncle know that I want to marry anybody except the lady he would like me to marry. I can put on the time and stave off my difficulties very well if I know that I really have you for a wife, but I could not possibly make a clean breast to him, and, if I offend him, it is good-bye to all my chance of ever getting the estates, though, of course, he cannot possibly do me out of my other rights. But as the estates happen to be alienable, where should I be if he chose to leave them elsewhere? No, as I told my friend, there is nothing for it but marrying and making things secure, and just keeping quiet until it is safe to reveal ourselves. And if you don't mind this, of course it will make very little difference to anybody else. I shall have to ask you, my darling, to go on as you are for a

short time longer. The banns were put up for the first time last Sunday, and will have to run two more Sundays before we can be married. As soon therefore as you can get comfortably away after two Sundays have gone by, you have only to let me know and I will make every preparation for our journey. I wish that it were not so terribly difficult to see you. That old Gorgon of yours seems to be dreadfully suspicious, from what I hear, of anything masculine that comes within reach of her flock—such an odd idea, when she is actually preparing you all to go out into the world, see, and conquer, that she should be so desperately afraid of any of you even speaking to a man now—so inconsistent.

"You will reply to this I know, darling. Can you not contrive to get out, if only for ten minutes to see me? I will wait any length of time, climb any wall, run any risk, if only for a chance of a single glance into your dear eyes, a single touch of your dear lips. Oh, my darling, I am counting the days, the very hours, almost the *minutes* to that

blessed and happy time, when we shall be together for always. I wonder if you love me half as well as I love you? Did you ever hear that old couplet?

> 'If you love me, as I love you,
> Nothing but death shall part us two.'

"I once laughed at that sort of thing. I thought a fellow was a sort of ass that cared more about one woman than another. And only a few months ago, a man said to me after I had been enunciating some such opinions, 'By Jove, when you do get it, you get it badly,' and I have got it, *very* badly. I've got a sweet little name ringing in my ears, and a pair of violet eyes always looking into mine, and a proud little golden head set up forever in my heart.

"I must stop, dearest. A thousand kisses—no one will ever love you like your own

"DICK."

"He is an Englishman," said Mrs. McKenzie, in a still more relieved tone.

"Oh, yes, he is an Englishman," said Madame, in a tone of superb indifference.

"Who is he?" Mrs. McKenzie asked.

"Ah," said the other significantly, "you will be clever if you can find that out. Betty absolutely refuses, determinedly refuses, to utter one word, good, bad, or indifferent on the subject. She won't say who wrote it, nor how she would have received it, and she also definitely refuses to make any promise that she will not see this man again."

"And where is she?" asked Mrs. McKenzie, rather faintly.

"She is practically in prison," returned the schoolmistress, brightening up a little. "It is not often that I have need to put any of my young ladies into prison, but I have such a place and, if necessary, I use it. In reality, she is in a room, which opens out of my bedroom, and which has no other means of egress."

"And she won't tell you anything about it?"

"Not one word," answered Madame Le Brun, "not a single word. But you are cold and tired

after your journey—how inhospitable of me not to offer you a cup of tea immediately. You ought to have a cup of tea before you see Betty; if the interview with her upsets you as much as the affair has upset me—and being her mother, I should say it will have an even worse effect upon you—you will need something to sustain you before you venture upon it."

"I should like a cup of tea," said Mrs. McKenzie, simply.

"You shall have it immediately." And Madame rang the bell. "Françine, bring Madame some tea immediately, and the sandwiches which I told Jeanette to prepare."

"Certainly, Madame," said Françine.

So they began to talk it all over again, and presently the tea was brought in, and Madame made haste to attend to the wants of her wearied visitor.

"Oh, yes, you must eat a little sandwich," she cried, when Mrs. McKenzie would have put them aside, "they have been made especially for you, my dear lady, you will really need it. I assure

you that Betty is absolutely obstinate and unyielding; indeed, believe me, you cannot better face the interview, than by fortifying yourself inwardly. Another cup of tea, let me beg of you."

And on the whole, Mrs. McKenzie found it was easier to eat the sandwiches and to drink the tea than it was to refuse them.

And, at last, Madame Le Brun suggested that they might go and see the prisoner. She led the way along the ice-cold passage, up the draughty staircase, and into her own large and handsome sleeping room. There was quite a good fire burning in the stove, and the room was lighted by a pretty shaded lamp hanging by a chain from the ceiling.

"Sit there in the arm-chair, dear lady," said Madame, in commiserating tones, admirably befitting the occasion, "and I will bring the naughty child to you."

She had closed the outer door and turned the key and she gently pushed Mrs. McKenzie into the large and comfortable easy chair set near to

the stove. Then she took the key of Betty's prison from her pocket and unlocked the door. The room within was dark as night.

"Betty," said Madame Le Brun, in a stern voice.

"Yes, Madame," came the answer out of the darkness.

"Will you be good enough to come here, please?"

"Certainly, Madame," Betty's voice replied.

She was apparently sitting or lying on the little bed, for it creaked as she rose and there was the sound of a light footfall on the hard carpet. Then Betty stepped into the circle of light cast by the lamp, evidently for the moment almost blinded by the sudden change from darkness to light. Then her eyes fell upon her mother sitting, tired and somewhat dishevelled, in the arm-chair by the stove.

"Oh, mother," she exclaimed, "is that you?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WRONG WAY.

"Put on
The dauntless spirit—of resolution."

Now if Mrs. McKenzie had seen Betty by herself, it is more than possible that the girl's steadfast reserve would have been broken down and that she would have told her mother everything, all that she most desired to know. But, unfortunately, women of the world, though they were, or at least thought themselves to be, Mrs. McKenzie and the schoolmistress treated her too much after the style of the condemned prisoner, to be very successful in getting at her heart.

"Yes, Betty," said Mrs. McKenzie, in answer to the girl's exclamation of surprise, "it is I."

Betty cast an indignant glance at the schoolmistress. Up to that moment, she had not believed that Madame had really carried out her threat of sending for her mother.

"I am sorry that Madame thought it necessary to send for you, mother, at this time of year too," she said, quietly. "I would much rather she had kept me locked up in there," with a gesture toward her prison, "for the rest of the term, than have dragged you over here."

"Madame was quite right to send for me, Betty," said Mrs. McKenzie, her voice and face hardening; "it would have been quite impossible for her to keep such a circumstance, concerning one of my daughters, from me."

"Yet," said Betty, in an equally hard tone, "it was only yesterday morning that Madame did offer, under certain conditions, to keep the information from you."

"Betty!" exclaimed Madame, in an awful voice, "do you dare to insinuate——?"

"I insinuate nothing, Madame," said Betty, defiantly; "I only state a bare fact."

"Mrs. McKenzie," Madame began, "I have had charge of your daughters now for over six years. I appeal to you—I ask you—I beg of you——"

"And I beg you will do nothing of the kind," said Betty's mother, decidedly, "there is no need to say anything more upon the subject; I am perfectly satisfied with everything that you have done for my children. I refuse to be made a judge or an umpire between this child and you; I will hear no more, Betty. The great question is not one of Madame's behavior, but of yours. You will tell me, please, immediately, who is the writer of this letter to you."

"I don't know," said Betty, deliberately.

"You don't know?"

"No," said Betty, "I have never seen that letter, I do not know from whom it is nor what there is in it."

"Then," said Mrs. McKenzie, very injudiciously, it must be owned, "you had better read it. You

will then understand why Madame objected to your receiving it, and why she thought it necessary to send for me."

Betty took the letter from her mother and moved nearer to the lamp that she more easily might read it. The schoolmistress cast a glance at the mother, a glance of distinct disapproval of what she had done, and made an involuntary gesture as if to snatch the letter away from the girl. It was so pronounced that Betty perceived it and put out her hand, as if to stave the schoolmistress off.

"My mother gave me this letter to read, Madame," she said, in a very cold voice, "so there is no need for you to interfere in the matter, one way or the other."

Then she turned her attention to the letter once more and read it, with a great tenderness sparkling in her eyes and the warm blood mounting to her cheeks, read every word of it, to the very end; then she turned and gave it back to her mother again.

"Thank you," she said, politely.

"Now," said Mrs. McKenzie, looking straight at her, "you will tell me who wrote it."

"No," said Betty, "I cannot tell you who wrote it."

"You cannot or you will not?"

"I will not," said Betty firmly.

"I insist upon your telling me."

"No, mother, I cannot tell you and I will not tell you—it is no use your asking me—it is no use your insisting—I shall not tell you."

"You persist in defying me, as you have defied Madame here?"

"No," said Betty, "I don't defy you at all. I cannot tell you, because I have promised not to do so, and I will not break my word."

"You admit that this is one of many letters?"

"I admit nothing," said Betty.

"If this had not been found, you would have gone away and married this man?"

"I have not said so," said the girl, looking at her mother with her wonderful blue eyes.

"And how did it get into the house?" asked

Mrs. McKenzie, baffled upon one point, and immediately starting on a new one.

"That I cannot tell you," said Betty, with superb disdain. "Madame knows more about it than I do. I don't know where Madame got it, nor how she got it—I don't know whether I have been betrayed or whether that letter was found by accident. In any case, I shall not commit myself, one way or the other."

"Betty," said Mrs. McKenzie, getting up from her chair and going close to where the girl was standing, "do you not understand that those who will not speak can sometimes be made to speak?"

"*Nobody* will make me speak," said Betty, then suddenly bursting out into a flame of passion. "Listen to me, mother," she cried. "Look here, it's no use your asking any more about it and talking at me like this. I have had the misfortune to be found out; well, I am quite willing to abide by the consequences. Madame here, offered, yesterday morning, if I would swear, never, as long as I lived, to see the person who wrote that letter again, that she

would, as she put it, refrain from breaking your heart. Well, I refused her offer distinctly. I told her she could do her worst. She has done her worst, she has sent for you; she has dragged you all the way from Blankhampton to Brussels on a most useless errand. It is immaterial what threats or persuasions you or she may bring to bear upon me—I will never say, by force, who wrote that letter nor give any information concerning it or concerning that person. I absolutely refuse to give up the idea of marrying him, because he is the only man that I could ever love or that I ever could marry—I might as well promise to give up my life itself. I could not do it, I should never keep the promise if I gave it. I daresay, as you have found me out a little too soon, that you will give me a very bad time for the next year or two. I can't help that, I must put up with it; but speak I never shall, until I speak of my own free will."

Now, with every word that passed the girl's lips, the mother's heart grew harder and more determined. She was very tired, and the whole affair

had come upon her with a shock, which had tried her greatly. She had passed a sleepless night of conjecture and doubt, and on her long journey her mind had been torn a thousand ways, in her attempts to account for the sudden and imperative summons which she had received from Madame. And now that the suspense was over and she knew the worst, she was filled with anger at the daring of this girl, but little more than a child as she was, in thus boldly braving her anger and the probable punishment of the future; and, as she stood there, with this beautiful defiant child before her, the child who would make no explanation whatever, who would not satisfy her even as to the social position of the lover she had picked up she knew not where, a sudden fear came over her of the effect that a serious and ill-matched entanglement might have upon the future prospects of her other three children; and she made up her mind there and then, that, cost what it might, Betty must be placed for the next two years at least in a fold of absolute safety.

"Well," she said, "it is no use our continuing this painful discussion any longer. You have had more than one opportunity of explaining everything, and to a certain extent, reinstating yourself in my good esteem. You can go back to your room, and I will discuss with Madame what is best to be done with you. Some day, perhaps, you will be thankful that we were in time to stop you from a course so foolish, so unnecessarily foolish in the case of all suitable marriages, as to arrange for your future, in this unwise and clandestine manner."

"Mother," said Betty in a softer voice, "I don't think that you ought to be so hard upon me or so certain that the man who loves me will play me false. You ran away to be married yourself."

"I ran away, it is true," said Mrs. McKenzie, looking at her daughter with cold and steely eyes, "but I ran away from a stepmother who had never been kind to me—a stepmother, who had all influence over the father who ought to have been the

shield to me that I have *tried* to be to you. I was exceptionally fortunate in the husband that I chose, but even my happy experience does not make me believe that a young girl of your age, without knowledge of the world, without knowledge of human nature, should be allowed to take her life entirely into her own hands. My stepmother neither knew nor cared what my ambitions or my desires might be—she did not in the least care what became of me—she never wished to have my confidence. You cannot say with truth, Betty, that I have been as a stepmother to you. If you had told me everything, I might even have arranged for this marriage to take place. I would, at least, have satisfied you, if I found this man to be an unsuitable husband for you. As it is, I shall have to deal hardly with you. I cannot deliberately spoil your elder sisters' chances in life by leaving you free to continue any clandestine love affair which you choose; nor can I have Nugent, who, being three years younger than you, should look up to you for an example of what she should be,

polluted by your perverse and underhand ways. Now I have no more to say to you."

Without a word more Betty went back into the dark room, Madame closing the door and locking it behind her.

"Now, my dear lady," she cried, in tender tones, "do take off your bonnet and refresh yourself with a wash and by brushing your hair; and, by that time, I think the little meal that I have ordered, will be ready."

"Thank you, thank you," said Mrs. McKenzie, "I will come down in a few minutes."

So Madame left her, and, presently, she went down the steep stairs again to the cheerful little *salon*, where an odor of fragrant soup greeted her. Till then, she did not know how really hungry and famished she was. Madame Le Brun was exceedingly kind to her, serving her and waiting upon her with assiduity and kindness.

"You would like to see the child?" she asked, when Françine had cleared the table once more.

"Yes," answered Mrs. McKenzie, "I should like to see Nugent very much."

So Madame went away to fetch Nugent herself, partly because she had been a long time absent from her flock, and partly because she fancied that Mrs. McKenzie would best like to see the child alone. She went into the large schoolroom where all the boarders were assembled and said, "Nugent McKenzie, I want you."

"Yes, Madame," cried Nugent, jumping up in a great hurry, for since Betty had been in disgrace and for a reason that she did not know, Nugent was prepared for any like calamity to fall upon herself.

"Come with me," said Madame, then turned and left the room again. "Nugent," she said, taking the child's hand and holding it kindly, when they reached the hall, "your mother is here."

"Mother! here!" Nugent cried.

"Yes, she is here, she has just arrived—at least, a short time ago—she is in my little *salon*. You can go in and see her."

"Oh, Madame, thank you," Nugent exclaimed, then sped into the salon like an arrow let fly from a bow.

"Mother!" she cried, bursting into the room, "why, who ever expected to see *you* here, what have you come for? Oh, mother, dear, *what* is wrong with Betty? I haven't seen her since yesterday morning, she is locked up in that horrid room of Madame's. What has she done? I never knew Betty do anything really wrong in my life—never gets a bad mark, always knows her lessons, never quarrels, is never untidy, never leaves her things unmended, never says a cross word to any human being—and there she was yesterday morning as happy and as contented as ever you saw Betty in all your life. And, all at once, the very next thing I heard was, that Madame had shut her up in that room, and I couldn't get anyone to tell me why."

"Well, Betty has done something very wrong," said Mrs. McKenzie, gravely.

"Well, I'm sure," cried Nugent, "she never meant to."

"I am afraid that she did, dear," said the mother, smiling sadly at the child's warm championship of her sister.

She did not even attempt to explain to Nugent what it was that Betty had done; indeed, she felt that it would be better if one so much younger was kept forever in ignorance of what had happened to get her sister into disgrace. With a mother's quickness, she saw at a glance that if Nugent believed it was only some school dismeanor for which Betty was suffering, it would make less impression upon her than if she was told the actual truth.

And after Nugent had gone off to bed, Mrs. McKenzie and Madame Le Brun sat up until a late hour by the sleepy stove, talking over and planning what would be the best thing for Mrs. McKenzie to do.

"You are quite determined," said Madame Le Brun, "to remove her from Nugent?"

"I think it would be best," Mrs. McKenzie answered. "She will not change from her present

attitude. As a little child, when Betty had made up her mind that she would not do a thing, threats and persuasions were equally useless in trying to make her do it; you could only trust to forgetfulness as an ultimate means of allowing it to be brought about."

"You think then that, by-and-by, she will forget this man?"

"Oh, I hope so—I trust so—I pray so. If I send her to a really strict school for a couple of years, or more if necessary, surely she will by that time not only have forgotten him but will be feeling a kind of grudge against him for having been the means of bringing so much isolation upon her. And I have three other daughters, Madame, I must think of them."

"I think you are perfectly right," said Madame Le Brun, who did not herself at all relish the task of keeping Miss Betty out of further mischief.

"But," Mrs. McKenzie went on, "I have not the smallest idea what to do with her—where to send her. You see, I have never had to think of

anything of the kind before; Rosa and Gwen were both such tractable girls."

"They were indeed," said Madame Le Brun, thinking how sweetly Rosa had given in, under somewhat the same circumstances, at the very first suggestion of sending for her mother, "they were indeed. But I must say, Betty has far more character than her sisters, there is far more in Betty; I have always looked upon her as the most intelligent of all my pupils—the one to whom I would go if I were in any difficulty. She is far beyond her years in many ways. Well, then, Mrs. McKenzie, if you really mean to put her under strict surveillance for two years, I can tell you of the very place, the very people with whom she will be perfectly safe."

CHAPTER V.

THE SACRED HEART.

"Better the world should know you as a sinner, than God know you as a hypocrite."

As Mrs. McKenzie and Madame Le Brun sat talking by the tall white stove, Madame had suggested that she knew the very place and the very people with whom, if Mrs. McKenzie desired it, Betty would be perfectly isolated and safe. But Mrs. McKenzie refused to hear anything more that night.

"If you will allow me to go to bed," she said, very wearily, "I would rather do so. I didn't sleep at all last night and am very tired, and, all my life, on all important matters I have refrained

from acting or deciding in any way in a hurry. I would like to sleep upon this business, before I decide one way or the other."

In truth an idea had come into her mind that, although Betty was very young (being only sixteen years old), she was yet very old for her age, very advanced both in body and mind, and that it might be just the very worst course that she could take if she were to ruthlessly crush out the girl's wishes and desires, without first trying to find out whether it would be more advantageous to let her go her own way—to let her go her own way, with certain modifications, of course.

She had seen from the letter signed "Dick," that the lover whom Betty had picked up was very much of a gentleman. There was no mistaking it, from the thick white paper, the careless yet handsome handwriting, the whole style and diction of the letter. What if this young man was really serious and wanted to marry Betty? If he was a gentleman, and if he was tolerably well off, Mrs. McKenzie was not sure that it would not be wisest

to let the marriage be brought about, rather than thwarting Betty in every possible way and, so to speak, shutting her up in punishment, for attempting the very crime which she, her mother, had actually committed before her. So, before she learned anything of convents or moral prisons, she determined that she would try once more whether Betty could be brought to reason, and confide everything to her.

She went to bed, and, strange to say, she slept well. Poor woman, she was tired out; indeed, as soon as her head touched the pillow, she fell into a sound sleep, from which she did not awake till Françine appeared about nine o'clock in the morning, bringing her the coffee and the crisp little rolls and butter, which form the early breakfast in French-speaking countries.

It was then that Mrs. McKenzie laid quietly back among her pillows, and thought out the entire situation. Once more she came to the conclusion that it would be wiser to try Betty again, to see if she could not bring her to something like

reason, if she could not persuade her to confide in her. And presently, full of this purpose, she rose and dressed, telling Madame that if she would give her the key of the inner room, she would go and talk seriously to the unhappy and refractory girl who was imprisoned there.

But Betty was obdurate. Perhaps it was a little unfortunate that Mrs. McKenzie did not say at once what was in her mind, that if she would confide in her the marriage might, if a suitable one, be arranged and carried out in a proper way.

Good and devoted mother as she had always been to her girls, Mrs. McKenzie did not understand how to eliminate rebellion other than by sternly quelling it. When she opened the door of the inner room Betty was sitting on the edge of her bed.

"Will you come here, Betty? I want to speak to you," said Mrs. McKenzie, in a voice which she tried hard not to make a cold one.

"Certainly, mother," said Betty.

As she drew near to the warm stove she could

not repress the shudder which shook her whole frame.

"You are very cold," said Mrs. McKenzie, looking at her keenly.

"Oh, starved to death," answered Betty promptly.

"That comes, you see," said her mother, "of doing wrong."

"Oh-h-h dear," groaned the girl, fully believing that she was in for a repetition of the previous night's "slating." The long-suffering tone and expression roused every shade of ire in Mrs. McKenzie's composition. She quite forgot that she had intended to try the effect of moral suasion and she looked up sharply enough.

"You had better sit down there and get warm," she said. "Is there no stove in that room?"

"No, mother, there is no stove, and my food has not been of a very warming description," Betty answered.

"It is your own fault; you have behaved shamefully to me."

"Oh, not at all, mother; at least I did not

mean to do so, that I assure you," Betty returned without hesitation.

"I suppose," said Mrs. McKenzie, in disgusted accents, "that you never thought about me at all."

"Well, mother dear, I am afraid perhaps I did not."

"Well, it is no use my arguing with you on that point, I daresay we should never agree, even if we were to argue until the millennium; but I have come to ask you once more, not as a matter of asserting my will over yours, but in the hope that something may yet be arranged to make things agreeable for everybody, that you will confide in me the name of the man, whose letter I showed you last night?"

"I am very sorry, mother; I cannot."

"But why cannot you?"

"Because I have promised that I would not."

"But don't you understand, child," cried Mrs. McKenzie, in exasperated tones, "don't you understand that this man, if he wishes to keep his identity so completely a secret from your own

people, can have no really good intentions toward you?"

"No, mother," said Betty, "I don't think so—I really don't think so."

"And you positively refuse to tell me who he is?"

"Yes, mother, I must."

"Then," said Mrs. McKenzie, rising, "although I am very sorry for it, I shall have no choice but to remove you from this house and place you under much stricter surveillance, and if in the future you feel yourself very hardly used, you will perhaps remember that I gave you every chance of confiding in me, and that I would have done my best to help you to the consummation of your desires, had it been practicable. You will remember that it is entirely your own fault, if you are not as happy in your next school, as you have been in this one or, perhaps I should say, as you ought to have been. Pray go back into the inner room, I have nothing more to say to you."

I am bound to say that it had never occurred to

Betty, that her mother had had any idea of helping to bring her marriage with Dick about. She was very young and had not much knowledge of the world, she felt as if her mother would use every effort to stop any marriage that she might desire to make, and as if she would be sure to make a point of proclaiming the truth to Dick's people, once she were in possession of his name and family. So, with the air and feeling of a young martyr, she went, head erect, and lips tightly compressed, into the inner room, which was practically her prison; and Mrs. McKenzie went sadly downstairs again, to tell Madame how her scheme had failed.

"Then," said Madame, "there is nothing for it but my telling you, as I offered to do last night, the name of the Sisterhood to which one or two unmanageable pupils have been sent from here These good sisters live on the very borders of Belgium not very far from Pepinster. It is a very strict religious community, and the convent is entirely enclosed within very high walls, and communication with the outer world is simply impos-

sible. There are no servants in the convent, their place being filled by working sisters, those who have brought no fortune into the community. Their vows are even more strict than those of the well-dowered nuns, therefore bribery is an absolute impossibility. If you take Betty there, you will give instructions as to what line you wish taken with her, and these instructions will be faithfully carried out and to the very letter. I have usually found," said Madame, in a meditative tone, " that six months at the Convent of the Sacred Heart is enough to tame the wildest and most insubordinate girl into absolute submission. Two, I have had there for three months—no starving, no violence, nothing of that kind, oh, no—but, at the end of the three months, we had no insubordination, no rebellion. One of these girls I only needed to look at, to bring her to my feet; the other, I had only to say, 'Marie, you have been once to the Convent of the Sacred Heart, another time that you go there, you will stay six months instead of three!' It was enough," said Madame, looking

at the ceiling and touching her lip with her forefinger.

"They don't starve them or anything dreadful of that kind?" the mother asked anxiously.

"Nothing of the kind, whatever. They are fed well, I have seen their ordinary meals on many occasions, and those pupils, who have returned to me after a term at the convent, have always declared to me that the food was plentiful and exceedingly well cooked. There are no punishments of a corporal kind whatever. I really can hardly tell you how the good sisters obtain their influence; but they do obtain it, and they maintain it, and I must say that in those cases where I have seen it put in force, I have seen the benefit of it as long as my acquaintance with the girl has lasted."

"Well, it sounds horrible," said Mrs. McKenzie, with a shudder, "but, at the same time, I have my other three girls to think of, and I should never forgive myself if, by being squeamish and soft-hearted now, I were to ruin their whole lives, as I feel sure vacillation on my part just now

would do. I really feel that, for the sake of the others, I must steel myself and simply harden my heart."

And Mrs. McKenzie very effectually did harden her heart. She went off that afternoon to interview the good sisters of the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Pepinster or, I should say, near to Pepinster, for she had to hire a carriage at the station, and it seemed a long and weary drive, ere the white walls of the convent came in sight.

To the Mother Superior of the convent she told her story and implored her aid.

"Oh! madame," said the good lady, in a bland voice of perfect assurance, "you are worrying yourself too much; these little events will happen when our daughters are young and pretty—and it goes without saying that your daughter is pretty."

Mrs. McKenzie blushed a little at the compliment and went on, in rather a trembling voice, to ask by what means they obtained so strong an influence over their young charges?

"That," said the stately Mother Superior, "is one of the things that I cannot tell you. Really, it is a sort of speciality of ours to get influence over young people. Seriously, I don't know how we do it. We don't beat them and we never starve them, we don't shut them up in prison, as poor Madame Le Brun has occasionally to do, and yet we never know what it is to have a really refractory pupil. For one thing, when they are naughty, they are never left day or night for a moment; they have always one of our good sisters praying over and beside them. We never overlook any of their short-comings, but we pray for them incessantly, and it is wonderful how efficacious the plan is."

Mrs. McKenzie simply shuddered. For a good woman, such as she was, she really felt great pity and commiseration for the erring Betty. But she was still hard; she had no notion of giving in and allowing Betty to take her sweet will with regard to the young gentleman called Dick; oh, dear, no, it was quite a case of the heart of Pharaoh, and it

grew harder and really more determined with every hour.

Eventually, she saw the little bedroom which would be Betty's during her sojourn with the good sisters, and she went back by the evening train, having thoroughly tested the qualities of the convent cook, and having promised to bring Betty on the morrow.

And, on the following day, a sad little procession passed out from the big house in the Avenue Louise. Betty, wearing a thick blue gauze veil, such as Frenchwomen wear when travelling, was brought out first, much after the style of a prisoner of great importance, and was placed in a closed *fiacre*, the windows of which were religiously closed; on Betty's side, the little silk curtain was drawn to. It was almost like a funeral, it was certainly like the funeral of poor Betty's love affair.

She could not help casting an eager glance around, when she got into the street. But no, there was not a soul about; there was no fond

lover, waiting eagerly and anxiously for a sight of his beloved, as she sped across the pavement; nothing of the kind. Dick, in truth, was at that moment puzzling his head much over a letter that did not concern Betty in any way. And so the girl was hurried into the *fiacre*, driven quickly through the town and bundled, with the same vigilance and care, into a first-class carriage of the train which leaves Brussels for Cologne between nine and ten in the forenoon.

It was a most tiresome journey. They had a *damen* carriage to themselves, and not one single soul got in to relieve the monotony of poor Betty's disgraceful circumstances. She was not even allowed to have a window corner; she was told to sit in the middle seat of the compartment, and did so with a meekness of aspect that ought to have satisfied the hearts of both her mother and her preceptress. They planted themselves one on either side of her, and neither of them spoke to her, except of necessity, during the whole of that long, cold, and dismal journey.

And, when they arrived at Pepinster, they made the same progress that Mrs. McKenzie had made on the day previously; indeed, they hired the same carriage and drove along the same stony, dreary, wretched road, until the white walls of the Convent came in sight. The Mother Superior received them with open arms.

"Ah," she said, taking hold of Betty's hand, and drawing her within the folds of her ample robes, "we have made little mistakes, we have gone astray from the right path; but here, in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, we will forget all that, we will soon retrieve the past, and we will go back home again, submissive and resigned to the will of those who know what is better for us than we know ourselves. Is it not so, my little one?"

Now most of the refractory young persons who were thus cast upon the Mother Superior's tender mercies, were in the habit of saying, with a sob and with downcast eyes, "Oh, oui, ma mère;" but not so Betty McKenzie. She looked at the holy woman with straight and fearless eyes, just as she

had looked at Madame and her mother during the three previous days.

"I don't think so, Madame," she said quietly, and yet with an air of extreme determination.

A faint smile flickered across the Mother Superior's face.

"We shall see what we shall see," she said enigmatically.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN JOHNSTONE.

"It is the fate of a woman
Long to be patient and silent, to wait like a ghost that is speechless."

EXACTLY as Mrs. McKenzie had done in the case of Nugent, so she did in the case of her two elder daughters on her return to Blankhampton. She had been absent nearly a week and was naturally received with a thousand questions as to the reason of Madame's telegram and the consequences of her journey.

"There is very little to tell," said she, quietly. "It was as Rosa said, Betty had got mixed up in a love affair. How she managed it I cannot think, but, I suppose, it all came of our letting them remain over the Christmas holidays and allowing

them to visit among our old friends in Brussels. If I had not had such a high opinion of Betty's steadiness and good sense, I should not have dreamed of allowing two young girls to remain, practically unfettered, in a gay little place like Brussels. I am dreadfully annoyed about it. However, I did not find out who the young man was, nor would Betty satisfy me, that I might trust her in future, so I have taken her to the Convent of the Sacred Heart, near Pepinster."

"Oh, my gracious!" cried Gwen, "you don't mean it, mother."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Mrs. McKenzie, "and there, for the present, she will remain. Nugent, of course, is left with Madame Le Brun and knows nothing whatever of all this. It is not necessary that she ever should know, and, if you two girls really wish to please me, you will not speak about this, either within or without our own walls. The least said, the soonest mended."

"And are we not to write to Betty?" asked Rosa.

"I would rather that you did not. The good sisters, who seemed to be most kind and charming women, particularly begged that she might not receive letters from home; they, in fact, were to open all her letters and, when I found how strong their wishes were upon the subject, I consented that they should open mine also; so, on the whole, it will be better if you girls do not write at all. Indeed, I would rather that you did not. Now, tell me, dears, all that you have done during my absence. How did the party at Matcham go off."

"Oh, charmingly," Rosa cried, glad enough to consign poor Betty's delinquencies to oblivion, "it was quite a lovely party, and a lot of the new regiment were there. Such nice fellows too, ever so much nicer than the 110th. And you know how good-natured Lady Lucifer is, mother, she actually had the rugs taken up and let us have a dance; wasn't it good of her?"

"Very good," said Mrs. McKenzie, "and you really enjoyed it?"

"Oh, dear, yes. Then, on the Wednesday, they

had a big shoot at Ingleby, and Lady Vivian, who was at Lady Lucifer's afternoon, asked us to go over in time to join the lunch, which was taken to Rufford Wood, and we certainly had a most lovely time—oh, quite a delightful time. We stayed out till dark and then we came back and dined at the Deanery. You were asked there, you remember."

"Oh, yes, to be sure," said Mrs. McKenzie. "I hope you told them on Tuesday, that I should not be able to go."

"Oh, yes, mother, we sent down at once—it was all right."

"Was it a nice party?"

"Oh, very nice."

"Who took you in to dinner?"

"Well," said Rosa, "it was really a party given for the new officers, and one took Gwen in, and another took me, and another took Aileen, who was looking extremely handsome, and I don't know whether it isn't a case of love at first sight with her, or I should say with both of them. I had a very

good time," said Rosa, with a sigh at the remembrance of it.

"So had I," chimed in Gwen. "My man is going to call during the week."

"So is mine," said Rosa.

"Oh, I suppose so," cried Mrs. McKenzie, smiling. "Well, I am glad you enjoyed yourselves; and very glad that you like these new men, because it does make a great difference in a little place like Blankhampton. Of course, you didn't hint where I was?"

"Oh, no, mother; we told them all that you had gone to London for a day or two."

"That's right."

She was really very wretched and down at heart about poor Betty, but the old proverb, "Out of sight out of mind," has a good deal of truth in it, and the question, "Can a mother forget?" may generally be very safely answered in the affirmative. I do not mean that Mrs. McKenzie forgot her daughter's existence, but she, after a few days, taught herself to believe that it was necessary for Betty's

social, if not for her soul's salvation, that she should be immured for an indefinite time, in that dreary retreat near Pepinster, known as the Convent of the Sacred Heart; and she was a woman who had much to occupy her, with the proper conduct of her house and with the welfare and pleasures of Rosa and Gwen, so that, by-and-by, poor Betty faded into the background and became a necessary evil rather than a trial to her.

Well, it happened that on the evening following Mrs. McKenzie's return from London, Mrs. Leith-Warminster gave a small dance at her charming house, River Cliff, to which Mrs. McKenzie and her girls were bidden. It was, however, a very, very select affair, only the very best people in the neighborhood and the officers from the garrison, no townspeople being invited at all. Not two minutes after they had entered the room, a tall and very good-looking young man came up and spoke to Gwen McKenzie.

"I hope you have not given away all your

dances, Miss Gwen," he said, in a pleasant and easy voice.

"No, not all of them," she replied in a very demure tone.

"And I may have some?"

"Why, surely. You know, I tried your dancing the other day."

"Ah, so you did; that was lucky for me as it turned out, for you might have tried my dancing, so that your programme would have been full, whenever you met me afterwards. Then, I may have the first?"

"Oh, yes, if you like."

"Thank you, and I'd like to have some more, while I've got the chance."

"You shall have some more," said Gwen, demurely, "how many would you like? One more?"

"Oh, I should like them all," he said, promptly.

"Yes," in an insinuating sort of tone, "but I am afraid you cannot have quite *all*, but if you like one other you can have it."

"No," said he, "I won't be satisfied with one other, I will have four others."

"I don't think I can quite let you have four others."

"Can't you manage it? Is your mother a very strict chaperon? I see that she's with you to-night; won't you introduce me and let me plead my cause? You see, I don't know many people here, and, of course, Mrs. Warminster will not expect me to make myself agreeable all round."

"Mrs. Warminster will probably take care that you do make yourself agreeable," said Gwen.

"Think so? Oh, I don't know; she's got a lot of howling swells here to-night, I don't think she will trouble about me. At all events, Miss McKenzie, I thoroughly believe in the old Bible saying, that God helps those that help themselves."

"I don't think you'll find that in the Bible," said Gwen, more demurely than before.

"No? Well, it was written by some old fellow who knew what he was talking about; it is a most sensible remark. At all events, if you wouldn't

mind my helping myself to a decent quantity of dances, I shall be infinitely grateful, and then I can have a good excuse if my charming hostess gives me to somebody I don't especially care about."

"Does she ever give you to anybody you don't like?"

"Oh, yes; at least not Mrs. Warminster, I've never been at a dance here before, but other hostesses never consider a man's feelings and are often most aggravating. I have known more than one hostess," went on Gwen's companion, "who would take a malicious pride in deliberately sending a man in to dinner with somebody that he detested. Now, you can't think of anything more utterly mean than that, I'm sure."

"Oh, most mean," said she. "By the bye, Mrs. Warminster didn't ask you to dance with me to-night, did she?"

"No, not to-night—I asked you quite of my own initiative. You'll introduce me to your mother, won't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Gwen, "I'll introduce you to my mother with pleasure. When I don't introduce my partners to my mother, I generally don't remember them when I meet them again."

"Well, I defy you to forget me," he said audaciously.

"But, let me see," said Gwen, with a judicial air, "Sir Thomas Vivian introduced us, but, do you know, I haven't the faintest idea what your name is."

"My name is Johnstone," he replied.

"Spelt Johnstone?" she asked.

"Yes, spelt Johnstone."

"Mr. Johnstone—Captain Johnstone—what?"

"Captain Johnstone—Francis, to particularize me—Frank, to still further particularize me."

"Very well," said Gwen, "then, before we dance, I will be dutiful and introduce you to my mother, who is just here."

He was a remarkably fine-looking and handsome young man, this Captain Frank Johnstone, very broad-shouldered and big, with killing gray eyes

and a mouth that seemed made for smiles. Instead of bowing, with the two stereotyped phrases, which are usual with young men, whom one meets at dances—"How do you do?—Charming dance isn't it?"—he sat down by Mrs. McKenzie and, at once, made himself agreeable to her.

"I have been most anxious to be introduced to you," he said, looking at her entreatingly, "I have been trying to persuade Miss Gwen to give me four dances and she has been mean enough to halve it and give me but two. She knows I can dance, because she danced with me one afternoon at Lady Lucifer's; tell me, Mrs. McKenzie, are you a very strict chaperon?"

"No, I never interfere about those matters," said she, smiling. "If my daughters were not capable of arranging their own dances I wouldn't take them to balls at all."

"What a sensible mother," said Captain Johnstone, in a tone of great admiration. "I hope," he went on after a moment, "that you will let me come and see you before long, it is so wretchedly

dull in Blankhampton, not half such a good quarter as Norwich. Here, scarcely anybody has taken any notice of us—though, to be sure, they never do at first—and we feel like a regiment of Ishmaelites. To-night I positively don't know half a dozen ladies in the room; I never saw our hostess before, indeed I only know two ladies that I am at all anxious to dance with."

"I'm afraid you are very fastidious," said Mrs. McKenzie, in much amusement.

"Not at all, quite the contrary; but, of course, I like to dance with a certain sort of young lady, one likes to choose one's partners, you know."

"Yes, of course, of course, and there is the music, so you must not stay here, wasting time talking to me. Come and see me when you like; Gwen will tell you the best time to find us."

And then he and Gwen went away, and were soon lost in the moving throng of dancers.

I need hardly say that this bold and outspoken young gentleman did have his four dances, and, if

the truth be told, one or two more besides, which they spent in a sheltered nook under the stairs.

"And I may come out and see you?" he said, persuasively. "Your mother said so."

"Oh yes, you may come," laughed Gwen. "Sunday afternoon always finds us, as we really very seldom go into the Parish—my mother never—and pretty often we are at home at five o'clock on other days; but then, on the other hand, pretty often we are out at that time."

"I shall take my chance then," he said, in a tone of much satisfaction. "I went to the Parish last Sunday afternoon" (they always call the Cathedral the Parish in Blankhampton) "because I was told it was quite the right thing to do—like Church Parade in Town on Sunday morning. I thought it very dull," he went on. "They put me in an exceedingly uncomfortable seat, between two parsons, two white-robed parsons, and one of them insisted on lending me half of his big music book for the anthem. I didn't want it," Captain Johnstone continued, "I had the use of my ears, and a

book of words is quite good enough for me without following the music, of which I don't understand a note. And it is such formidable work going up and waiting for your seat, amongst all those rows of ladies ; and the seat-holders look so frightfully scornful—I suppose it is natural that the regular flock should look scornful at the occasional sheep."

" Oh, I don't know," said Gwen, " we never feel like that when we go, and we always get a very good seat, in fact, we always sit in the Deanery pew—Lady Margaret is very good about that. But it's such a long way and we can't drive in a rakish-looking little trap on Sunday, and it's awfully tiring to walk and still more tiring to walk home, and we generally have people, who look in on Sunday afternoon, and, somehow, we don't very often go. That's just the long and the short of it. But I never feel shy of going into the Parish," she added, roguishly.

" Oh, well," he returned, " I don't know that I'm *shy* exactly, but, of course, there are rows and rows of ladies and regular stall-holders and all those

people, and, of course, it is an ordeal facing them especially when one has to walk out and take deep interest in the windows and the tombstones, instead of speaking to one's friends, as everyone else is doing."

"Oh, you will soon get over that," said Gwen, "in one month you will know every man, woman, and child in the place, as I do."

"And how long have you lived here?" he asked.

"Oh, not very long, though long enough to have gauged Blankhampton—about two years," she replied.

"And before that?" he asked, more that he might prolong the conversation than that he really desired information.

"Oh, before that time, we lived in Brussels," she said simply.

CHAPTER VII.

A FAMILY DISCUSSION.

"Take her to thy protecting arms,
With all her youth and all her charms."

TIME sped pleasantly by for the family at the Rosary. Days grew into weeks, weeks into years, two of them; but neither of Mrs. McKenzie's daughters had thought fit to leave the parent nest. Rosa, who was now three and twenty, seemed as disinclined to marry, as she had done at eighteen. Offers indeed, she had had in plenty, offers that were both good, bad, and indifferent; but Rosa was obdurate.

"Dear mother," she said one day, when Mrs. McKenzie was rather bewailing the fact of her having refused a high dignitary of the Church, "the dear Bishop may be very handsome, and very

popular, and altogether fascinating, and delightful and very young for his eminence, but it is no use your saying anything—he is not for me. And, after all, he is only a Suffragan Bishop, so pray don't try to dazzle me with him any more."

"But he will be a Bishop some day," said Mrs. McKenzie, with delightful ignorance of matters appertaining to the Church militant, "and he is a very handsome man and he is very well off, with good private means."

"I can't help it, mother," said Rosa, "I'm very sorry. When you have Betty home again, I'll take turns with all the dances, indeed, I'll stop at home altogether if you like, but *don't* force me to marry somebody that I don't care about, as one ought to care about one's husband. However dear and sweet and charming he is, dear mother, he is not for me, *not* for me."

"Well, there was the General," said Mrs. McKenzie, rather vexedly.

"I know there was the General, dear mother, I know it. He wore stays, darling—you wouldn't

expect your Rosey to marry a man who wore stays, would you?"

"Well I don't see how you could have known."

"How I could have known? Well, I don't see how I could help knowing and *pinch*—why there's not a single girl of my acquaintance that pinches herself a quarter as much as General Martover used to do. No, I really couldn't bring myself to marry General Martover, mother."

"Well, you've lost your chance now," said Mrs. McKenzie; "other people were glad enough to bring themselves to marry him."

"Oh, dear, yes; after all it was only one of Lady Hillingdon's daughters. They're nice girls," Rosa went on meditatively, "but with her, poor thing, it was a case either of marrying young Stubbs or of marrying General Martover, and, of course, I would rather marry General Martover than I would marry young Stubbs."

"I can't think why Lady Hillingdon is so taken up with Lady Stubbs," cried Mrs. McKenzie, forgetting her grievance a little.

"Money, money, my dear mother, money. It is answerable for a great deal in this world, and our poor dear Lady Hillingdon is very keen on the acquisition thereof. But, for my own part," cried Rosa with superb disdain, "I should say, taken along with the Stubbs, it would be dear at the price."

"But everybody knows their own know best," chimed in Gwen, who was toasting her feet by the fire and glancing idly through the London paper, which had just come.

"And you have definitely refused the Bishop?" said Mrs. McKenzie.

"Oh, yes, dear, definitely. I don't take any interest in Church matters, I don't care anything about confirmations nor new Church organs, nor all the different things that a Bishop's wife has to take interest in. Really, I'm very sorry that I can't oblige you by marrying the Bishop. Some girls are cut out for that sort of thing, I really am not."

"But you don't seem able to make up your mind what you are cut out for," said Mrs. McKenzie.

"No, dear that's just it. But you don't want to get rid of me, do you? I'll go when the right man asks me, but he hasn't even shown himself yet."

"Of course I don't want to get rid of you; what a dreadful idea. Only a marriage to a Bishop with large private means is a good marriage and I should have been glad if you had seen your way to it."

"It's a dreadfully good marriage, dear," said Rosa, with an air of humility, "but, not for me, darling, not for me; most emphatically, *not* for me."

"By the bye, mother," said Gwen, "what are you going to do about Betty?"

"I really don't know," said Mrs. McKenzie.

"Don't you think it is time Betty was let out of prison? You'll be having her turning into a nun or hanging herself by her stockings or something dreadful or other, if you don't have her home soon. And, after all, what did she do? Got mixed up in some absurd love affair—we all had love affairs at Madame's."

"What!"

"Of course we had. Why, Rosa and I both had desperate love affairs. Why Rosey was in that room for two whole days; weren't you, Rosey?"

"I was," said Rosa.

"And Madame never told me," said Mrs. McKenzie.

"Oh, my dear mother, you surely haven't been so silly as to place implicit faith in Madame. Why she went through all the same scenes with us. With Rosey it was a little hook-nosed officer, we always used to call him 'Little Hook-nose,' and he used to turn up his eyes and rattle his sword, when we were out walking, and he wrote Rosey a love letter—such a love letter as it was, too, in such bad English—and Madame got hold of it, of course she was always sneaking and spying about—(very improper I call it, to teach girls to sneak and spy about)—as if a good-looking girl like Rosey would want to marry a little hook-nosed Belgian officer, on twopence a week, why, nobody but a woman, who had been silly enough to marry a Belgian herself, would ever think of such a thing!"

"How was it you didn't tell me all this before?" cried Mrs. McKenzie.

"Oh, my dear mother, do you think school-girls would bring everything of that kind to their mothers? And you never told us what was the matter with Betty—what she had done—we knew it was something of the same kind—all Madame's foolery. Why, she had actually written the telegram to summon you, when Rosey gave in and promised she would never speak to the little man again. As for me," laughing gayly at the remembrance of it, "I shall never forget my turn—never. Madame came one day into the music-chamber, where I was having a music lesson with Herr Strümmelpoffer, such an idiot, mother, as you never saw in your life; he was a little bit spoony, I admit it—but there, it didn't hurt anybody. The fact was, Madame was spoony on him herself; that was about the English or Belgian of it. Oh, I know Madame, I can read Madame like reading a book. She didn't shut me up in the room that time, because she came into the room

just as he had dropped on one knee and was beginning an interesting declaration of love. 'Beautiful and charming English lady,' gobbled Strümmelpoffer — 'Englanderin' *he* called it—'if you will but listen to my suit, while I tell you how I honorably love and adore you—' and then Madame came in very quietly, as she generally did—and I saw by her face that she had heard him. I must own I was rather hard on poor old Strümmelpoffer that time, for I got up and stood very stiffly and said, as if I hadn't seen Madame, 'Sir, if you so far forget yourself again, I shall have to complain to Madame.' And Madame sent me out of the room in an awful voice, and as for poor old Strümmelpoffer, I saw him going out of the house, half an hour afterwards, like a dog with his tail between his legs. He never came any more, and Madame told me I had been discretion itself. Why, my dear mother, if she hadn't happened to come in just then, I should have gone on with the poor old thing as far as I dared, and he would have brought me *bonbons* and posted my

letters, and generally made himself most useful to me. He did write to me after that, but I thought it was not discreet to continue such a correspondence, so I took the letter to Madame."

"You mean little wretch," laughed Rosa.

"Quite right," said Mrs. McKenzie.

"Oh, yes, dear, quite right; but if none of your daughters get into worse trouble than I got into at No. 00 Avenue Louise, you may think yourself one of the luckiest mothers in the United Kingdom. But about Betty—what are you going to do?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. McKenzie.

"Mother, dear, do you know that that poor child has been shut up in that dreadful place for just two years?"

"I know it."

"That none of us have been allowed to write to her, that she has never been home for her holidays? What did she do, when all's said and done?"

"Well, if I tell you," said Mrs. McKenzie, "you will remember that Nugent is not to hear one word about it."

"Nugent shall not hear a word about it from us, eh, Rosa?"

"Certainly not," said Rosa, who had a tremendous idea of keeping fifteen-year-old Nugent in her place.

Then Mrs. McKenzie told them all about the terrible letter, which Madame had discovered, and about which Betty had definitely and positively refused to give any information whatever.

"Was it an Englishman's letter?"

"Yes, certainly it was."

"Did it strike you as the letter of a gentleman?"

"Yes, I must say it did."

"Then, my dear mother, how very silly you were not to coax the man's name out of Betty."

"Betty was so obstinate, so defiant," murmured Mrs. McKenzie.

"Why, of course, she was; Betty is a girl of spirit, not to be got over by a thing like Madame Le Brun, a silly, romantic old thing, who is a perfect disgrace to her sex. Why, mother, I've seen Madame take up a glass that old Vanskuyk, the

drawing-master, had drunk a liqueur out of, I've seen that silly old woman kiss the rim of the glass where his lips had touched it—a snuffy old thing that you wouldn't pick up for nothing if you saw him lying in the street!"

"Gwen!" cried Mrs. McKenzie.

"Oh, yes, you may say, 'Gween!' but it's perfectly true; she didn't know I saw her, but I did."

"You must have been mistaken."

"Me mistaken! Mother, dear, I know Madame a great deal better than you do; you only see the society and strictly proper side of Madame. It isn't girls like Betty, with wills, and minds, and opinions of their own, who get on at No. 00 Avenue Louise, not a bit of it; it's a girl who'll look rapturously at Madame and say, 'Darling, how sweet you look to-day,' or 'Dearest Madame, how that dress becomes you, I've never seen you look so charming in anything before;' that's the kind of girl who gets on in that establishment. Rosa and I used to do it a good bit—didn't we, Rosey?—simply because it was advantageous and we got a

better time, and the silly old thing didn't see that it was all put on. Didn't she tell you what sweet and tractable girls we were?"

"Yes, she did," admitted Mrs. McKenzie.

"Well, all I can say is," said Gwen with a laugh, "that it's a thousand pities Madame hasn't got charge of us now for a few days; we should very soon undeceive her."

"All this is a revelation to me," cried Mrs. McKenzie, in a tragic voice.

"Well, you see, dear, you didn't take us into your confidence when you came back, and we naturally felt a certain delicacy in asking, what Betty had done; and besides you snubbed us and sat upon us, and we didn't want to seem to be gloating over any trouble that poor Betty was in; but we think a great deal more of Betty than Madame, and we would take Betty's word before Madame's any day. Oh, of course, she wouldn't tell, after Madame had been nagging at her; Betty's not the girl to do that—Betty's a girl of spirit. Of course, dear mother, we don't like to

find fault with you, because never were girls who had such a mother as you've been to us, but at the same time, we do think you've treated poor Betty very harshly and, after all, she's only eighteen now and it's very hard she should go on being shut up over a letter that somebody else wrote to her, isn't it?"

"Shall I send for Betty home again?" asked Mrs. McKenzie, in a voice of despair.

"I should if I were you," said Rosa. "Give the poor child a good time and don't say anything about the old cat at all. Treat her as if she'd come home from an ordinary school and buy her some pretty clothes, mother, and make a lot of her. You don't know what a dear child Betty is, mother; she's worth all the rest of us put together."

"I don't know so much about that," said the mother, smiling at them, "but I'll take your advice, children, and she shall come back."

"Well, let her come back with a clean slate,

if she does," said Gwen, sensibly; "don't ever throw the past at her."

"Yes, we shall do that. Perhaps I have been too harsh. But," with sudden apprehension, "supposing that that man finds her out again?"

"Well, dear mother, he can't eat her. Did father want to eat you when he ran away with you? Besides, probably all the conditions of his life are changed, and he is two years older and so is she. I wouldn't worry so about it, if I were you; only make up your mind that Betty is coming home, and that we are not going to have any disagreeables of any kind. Why, the very fact of her being with us, who are clear-headed and sensible girls, ought to be quite enough to keep Betty as clear-headed as you can possibly desire."

CHAPTER VIII.

FREEDOM.

—— "The resolute will of a strong man scorns such means, and struggles nobly with his foe to achieve great deeds."

In accordance with her promise to her daughters, Mrs. McKenzie sent instructions to the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart of Pepinster, that the erring and unfortunate Betty should return home at the Easter term, and she told the Mother Superior that she would either send someone to fetch her or provide a suitable escort for the homeward journey.

"You had better let me go, mother," said Rosa, when her mother was wondering what would be the best plan for her to follow.

"Let you go!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, dear. I could run down by the Doncaster train to Parkeston and cross that evening, and I should reach Pepinster the next day. Believe me, mother dear, it will be better for Betty and for breaking her coming home again, and breaking her into family life once more, if I go to fetch her rather than if you do. And really, dear, a girl who can refuse a general and a bishop, can very well be trusted to make a little journey to Pepinster."

"Oh, I was not thinking of that," said Mrs. McKenzie hastily. "Well, then, dear Rosey, if you will go and fetch Betty, Gwen and I will go to London and you can meet us there."

"That would be very nice," said Rosa; "that would answer every purpose admirably."

Well, in due time Easter arrived, and Betty, who had not been apprised by the good lady who was the ruling spirit of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, of her approaching return to home and freedom, was startled one evening by being told to go into the Mother Superior's private *salon*.

She opened the door and went in hesitatingly, not knowing whether it might be some priest, who would try to bring her to what the Mother Superior was pleased to call a sense of her unfilial wickedness. But no, it was no priest, but was a young and pretty woman, in a smart little hat, who greeted her astonished eyes.

"Betty!" said a voice.

"Why, Rosey," she cried, with a half sob.

"Yes, it is I, dear," catching her in her arms and holding her very closely to her, "it is I, dear, come to fetch you home."

"Has anything happened to mother?" asked Betty, suddenly growing very white.

"Nothing at all, dear, except that she has confided in us at last, and has suddenly woke up to the fact that Madame Le Brun is a silly old fool, much given to making mountains out of mole-hills. And I have come to fetch you home, darling, and we will never, never, have any disagreeables or anything horrid between us again. Gwen and I have only known, since a few weeks, why you

were shut up here for all this long cruel time. Dearest, I want you to pack all your things together and let us get away by the first train in the morning. I am tired with my long journey, but I am going to ask Superior to let you come down to the hotel with me, and we will have dinner together."

"She won't," said Betty with conviction.

The girl was trembling and pale as death, her eyes were bright with tears, but they did not overflow their usual bounds. The door opened and the Mother Superior came in. Betty stiffened herself instantly, the smile left her face, the tears seemed to be thrust backward from her eyes, and she became like a statue or as one who was frozen.

"Ah, good day, Mademoiselle," the holy woman said, in a very bland and urbane voice, "and how do you find this little one looking?"

"Well, Madame," said Rosa deliberately, "I think she has been here too long. The life of the cloister is not the best for a young girl who is intended to go out into the world, after all, and two years is a

long time to be shut off entirely from your kindred. But I must say that I think my sister looks very well in health and not at all as if you had fed her on prison diet. But, Madame, I hope that you will grant me a great favor to-night. I have just arrived and am very tired and hungry; do you permit me to have the company of my sister at the hotel, I would so much rather not be alone there?"

"Oh, assuredly," with a polite gesture, "this little one has done with us now—she is no longer a pupil of the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and you are a steady young lady, chosen by her mother to take charge of her on her way home. I have no fault to find with Miss Bettee, her conduct here has been absolutely irreproachable; we do not have trouble with our pupils often. The only wish that I would have liked her to comply with, is to give up the name of the man, who was dastardly enough to wish to inveigle her from her school in Brussels."

"My sister could not give up that name, Madame;

she had passed her word that she would not do so. Am I not right, Betty?"

"Yes," said Betty, in a steady voice.

"We English people do not break our word," Rosa went on, with a sudden dignity, which made the Mother Superior long to have her for a good long spell in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, "we would rather die than break our word at any time."

"We do not here take national prejudices into consideration; we set a certain line of conduct for our pupils, such as we believe to be the best for them and, if they do not fall in with our requirements, we consider that an act of insubordination."

"Is that my sister's only act of insubordination?" asked Rosa quickly.

"The only one," admitted the Superior.

"Then I think you can have very little, almost nothing to complain of. My mother will be very pleased to hear of it. I must say," added Rosa, in a very haughty voice, "that I don't think Madame Le Brun acted very kindly or very wisely in mak-

ing this child," putting her hand on Betty's shoulder, "an outcast from her people and an object of disgrace among her fellow-pupils. After all," she went on, with as much of a sneer as a well-bred girl could allow herself, "after all, it was but that my sister had the misfortune to be found out. All the girls in Madame Le Brun's establishment have love affairs; I and my second sister were there for some years, we know the establishment well, and we know Madame herself. She had the misfortune, so far as we are concerned, to persuade my mother not to confide in us, and it was not till a few weeks ago that my mother told us the reason of my sister's imprisonment here."

"Oh, pray do not call her sojourn among us by so hard a name," said the Mother Superior, smiling slightly, and wishing still more that she could have the control of Miss McKenzie's fortunes for a year or so.

"You can't call it anything else," said Rosa, with a careless air. "Then, if you will allow my sister to go with me now, I shall be very grateful,

as," glancing at the watch on her wrist, "I ordered dinner for eight o'clock."

"Certainly. My child," turning to Betty, and taking both her hands, "my child, I give you into your sister's care. You are going out into the world, and I hope that you will remember in after years, that we did not *ask* you to come and join our convent life, that we but followed the desires of your mother in keeping you so strictly under surveillance as we have done. Excepting that you have been too faithful in keeping your word, I have had no fault to find with you."

"Thank you, Superior," said Betty; "I will try to remember."

The Mother Superior then saluted Miss McKenzie, and, with a few muttered words, which might have been a benediction or just the other thing, betook herself noiselessly out of the room.

"My poor darling," said Rosa, as the door closed behind the holy woman, "I'm afraid you have suffered a perfect martyrdom here."

"Rosey," said Betty, taking hold of her sister's

hands and holding them hard, "I have not suffered a martyrdom, but my life has been one everlasting hell! You don't know what these holy women do —they use prayer for a scourge, they use holy devotion for a punishment; if you don't follow out every order strictly and to the letter, they come to you in relays, and they pray over you and for you, day and night, without ceasing. I have known what it is to wish there was no God, to wish that prayer had never been invented, I have known what it is to loathe religion, and religious people. I assure you, Rosey, that to keep my faith with the man that I loved once, I have endured weeks and months of goading and agony."

"My dear, we will make you forget all that," said Rosa, holding her sister's head close against her shoulder; "we will go home and open a new book. You will find that mother is something more than sorry, that she was so entirely led as she was by that foolish old woman at Brussels. She did what she thought was for the best and I hope, darling, that you will never reproach her for

this cruel time in your life. Nobody can regret it more than she does, and, after all, dear, she has been a very good mother to all of us. We will go back and we will try to forget that these dreadful two years have ever been."

Most girls would have broken down at such a genuine expression of sympathy and of kind thought for the future. Not so Betty. Her eyes were bright, but she seemed to have forgotten how to shed tears. And, ten minutes later, when she had fetched her hat and fur-trimmed coat, the two sisters went out of the heavily-barred convent door, crossed the courtyard and were let out of the outer door opening into the street, by the humbler sister who performed the menial office of portress.

"How many times have you been outside this door?" asked Rosa, putting her arm through Betty's.

"Never," said Betty.

"What!" cried her sister.

"Never," said Betty, "I have never seen the street. For two years I have passed the whole

time within those dreadful walls. I told you just now that life had been a hell to me. Why, even until I walked into the Superior's little *salon* this afternoon, I had not the least idea that there was any prospect of my going home at all."

"My poor darling," cried Rosa, pitifully.

It seemed as if she could not make enough of the young sister, who had suffered so much for what, to her, seemed so slight a cause.

The following day they went up to the convent and fetched away all Betty's belongings. Then they said good-bye to the Mother Superior, as they both hoped for all time.

The Mother Superior uttered some benedictions over Betty, but I greatly fear that, as they followed the most terrible two years of her whole life, they were as good seed cast upon stony ground; nay, even the good seed, which fell upon stony ground, made an attempt to spring up until the sun withered it; but to Betty they fell as upon a dead heart.

Not one word did Rosa utter to her sister of the

lover for whose sake, she had endured this terrible time. They travelled that day from Pepinster to Brussels, for, as Rosa very truly said, it was perfectly impossible that Betty could travel without at least a new hat and some new shoes, besides one or two other trifles of dress, such as the good Sisters of the Convent of the Sacred Heart had not troubled to tell her mother were necessary for her. They went to the quiet Hôtel de l'Europe, when they reached Brussels, and, as soon as they had settled themselves in their room, and had removed the traces of their journey from themselves, they went off first down the rue Royale and then down the Montagne de la Cour in quest of a new hat for Betty.

Now, in Brussels, buying a hat is a very serious matter; for you see the most beautiful hats and bonnets set out in the milliners' shops but, as they are never sewn but only pinned together, they can never sell you that particular article but have always to make you one in copy of it. However, they did succeed in getting a fashionable and

pretty head-covering promised for that evening, and then they went off after shoes and slippers, and after gloves and handkerchiefs, and a few pretty new collars and ties, for Betty to wear with her two-years'-old tailor-made gown.

"Betty, would you like to go and have an ice and some chocolate?" asked Rosa, when they had finished their shopping, and mindful of the happy school-days when they had gone off sometimes in charge of a young governess for a good feed at the sweet-shops.

"Oh, I should," cried Betty.

They were very wicked that afternoon, both of them. I mean that they were in a wicked mood, gay and brimming over with mischief—even Betty was gay, who had almost forgotten how to be so. They went to a delightful shop in the rue de Namond, they had chocolate and ices and tempting-looking cakes, all cream and jam, and they wound up with a tiny glass of Benedictine each.

Well, perhaps it was rather a fast thing for two

young women to do, to drink liqueur in the afternoon; but, considering the heterogeneous foods of which they had eaten previously, I think it was an exceedingly reasonable and wise thing, after such a doubtful feast.

"Now, what shall we do before dinner? We have an hour and a half," said Rosa. "It's a lovely afternoon and it won't be dark for ever so long yet. Shall we go on a tram, and go wherever it goes and come back with it? "

"Oh, lovely," cried Betty.

"I suppose you won't care to go and call at that silly old woman's at No. 00 Avenue Louise?"

"I shouldn't think so," said Betty, in a disgusted tone.

"Is there any place where you would like to go?"

"No—no, dear, no," Betty answered.

But Rosa had got it into her head that Betty did want to do some particular thing.

"Then shall we get on a tram, and go the entire round of the city?"

"Yes, that would be lovely," the girl cried.

So they strolled up to the Place Royale and demanded tickets for the entire tour.

"Betty," said Rosa, when they had nearly completed the circle of the city, "do you know what I think?"

"No," said Betty, "how should I?"

"I think, dear," she said, gently, "that you are rather on the lookout for some particular person. Tell me, darling—I don't want to pry into your secrets, I only want to be the best and kindest and dearest of sisters to you—but tell me, dear, strictly between ourselves, are you not looking out for *him*, darling?"

CHAPTER IX.

PAIN AND PLEASURE.

"Folded hands are not necessarily resigned ones."

"ARE you looking out for *him*, darling?" said Rosa McKenzie in her kindest and most coaxing tones.

For a moment Betty was tempted to tell her sister everything; but she had not been immured in that terrible convent, for two whole weary years, without a break, to no purpose, and, in an instant, the little gush of sisterly affection, the momentary longing to reveal the inmost recesses of her heart to some kindly human being passed, and she turned round upon her sister, with a face that was as impassive as a face carven out of stone.

"Oh, no, dear," she said, "you fancy things. I've been so long shut up among those dreadful

sisters, whose faces, when I did happen to see them, which was not very often, were for the most part like waxen masks, without passions, without hope of the future or even pleasant memories of the past. I am excited, dear, to see even artisans walking about the street in their rakish-looking blue blouses; remember I have never seen a street for two years."

"My poor darling," cried Rosa tenderly.

"Remember," Betty went on, "that I had not the least idea of what fashion has been doing for two years, until I saw you; and you, in your pretty frock, were like a creature from another world. I've been *dead* for two years," she went on, with a more passionate outbreak, "and you must not be surprised, Rosey, that I have come back to life with something of surprise and astonishment about my whole bearing, because, although because I have only been dead two years, it has seemed like two centuries. Oh, Rosey, Rosey dear, it's not the busy happy lives that go by too quickly, what a mistake that is; it's the dull unchanging days that go

by one after another, until you lose count of them and you only know that it is Sunday by a difference in the prayers. I very often did not even know that. At first they seem slow, then to glide away without anything to mark their flight; then they seem to get endless. I swear to you, Rosey, that I have never once been left alone during the whole of the two years that I have been shut up in that place I have never once been left alone for a single moment with one of my fellow-pupils. Did one ever say 'Good-morning' to me or look as if she would like to kiss me, a black-robed sister parted us instantly. I believe that all the other girls had been sent there for some form of punishment; but I believe that they thought I had committed a murder, and they never knew that I had only been sent to prison with hard labor for the crime of having kept faith."

"My dear, you must try and forget all that," said Rosa pitifully, holding her sister's hand very tightly.

"Forget!" said Betty, turning her lovely eyes

upon her, "I never used to know what it was to wish to forget, but now, I quite understand why those, with apparently every happiness in life, pray and long for forgetfulness; I quite understand why the old are glad to die and be at peace forever. Don't talk about it," she went on, with sudden vehemence, "let me pick up my old life in my own way—don't ask me any questions. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you everything, not because I don't love you now, dear, but because the wound, which might have healed if treated rightly, is too deep and too sore now that it has been cauterized and kept open all these weary, weary months. Talk to me about anything else, but ask Gwen not to mention it to me; if I can forget that I have been in prison, it will be because you all do not remind me of it."

"I will do whatever you like, dearest," said Rosey, in her kindest voice, "anything that you like. I will do anything to help you to forget this terrible time. But see, here we are at the Place Royale again; we have still half-an-hour before we

need think of dinner; shall we go down the Montagne de la Cour again or shall we go down the Rue Royale?"

"Oh, down the Rue Royale," said Betty, "I had a vision of a lovely sweet-shop there as we came along just now."

She very quickly recovered the brilliant spirits in which she had been, ever since the outer gate of the Convent of the Sacred Heart had closed behind them forever; and the sisters went arm in arm up the broad, handsome street, almost flattening their noses against the windows of the charming shops. So the nearest approach that Betty made towards confiding her heart's secret to any other than her own self, passed and went by.

They went back to the Hôtel de l'Europe, dined, and very soon afterwards went to bed. Rosa McKenzie, accustomed to excitement and change, dropped asleep almost immediately; but Betty, to whom the events of the last few hours had been untold joy and delight, passed but a restless night lying wide awake far into the small hours, and then

sleeping fitfully until she heard the maids begin stirring about below.

Lie there she could not. She got up and dressed, although the water was icy cold and the morning light faint and gray. And when she got downstairs, she found chaos. An untidy *salon*, a dishevelled *salle*, and generally surprise and sleepiness and almost resentment upon the faces of every servant that she met. She had taken down her hat and coat with her, and so she went for a brisk walk round the park, returning finally to find Rosa, having just opened her eyes and rung for coffee and rolls.

"You lazy creature," she said, "do you get up at this time every morning?"

"Well, I generally get up later than this," admitted Rosa.

"Why," said Betty, "four o'clock in the morning for two whole years, has seen me out of my bed —such as it was, a plank and a worsted rug or two —Ugh—dreadful! I couldn't sleep last night, the

bed was so soft. I have been for a brisk walk round the park."

"Dear me, how dreadfully energetic you are, I hope we shall soon cure you, dear, of such an uncomfortable propensity, for it won't suit anybody at Blankhampton to be up at four o'clock in the morning; it invariably means that you're dead sleepy at night, just when life is beginning."

"Well, perhaps; but you're going to get up after you've had your coffee, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, yes, only give me time to open my eyes," protested Rosa; "we had rather a hard time yesterday. What are you going to do with yourself in the meantime?"

"I think," said Betty deliberately, "that I shall walk up the Avenue Louise and look at the outside of the house where—*I died*."

"Betty!" cried Rosey.

"I don't think if I meet Madame Le Brun," said Betty seriously, "that she will escape with her life."

"My dear!" cried Rosa, who believed every word that her sister said.

"If I were to go for Madame Le Brun," said Betty, "she would have a very short shrift and no favor. My, how she would squeal! However, I shall not see her, for I suppose it is just the time when she goes over to England with some of her wretched victims and returns with a batch of other poor creatures, who are taught to be sly and demure and deceitful. But I should like to see the outside of the house, all the same."

"Well, my dear, do as you like," said Rosa. "Have another roll—there's plenty more hot milk and coffee."

"Yes, I think I will," said Betty, who had a fine healthy appetite and was not ashamed to own it.

So when they had finished their meal, she went down again and out into the street. She turned in to the left and went down the Montagne de la Cour to the Madeleine, but there was nothing worth seeing there; it was too early in the year. She looked in at a few lace shops, as she climbed the steep

street again; she bought a newspaper of the apple-cheeked old woman sitting in her wonted place at the corner, and then she turned up the Rue de Namour towards the Avenue Louise.

Well, it was a satisfaction to the girl to stand on the opposite side of the road and scan the irreproachable windows of Madame Le Brun's irreproachable residence, to think of the last time that she had crossed that pavement, of the eager way in which she had looked up and down hoping to catch a glance of him, for whom she had been condemned to forego all that makes life endurable, for the space of two weary years. She wondered where he was now?

She was wearing an elderly blue serge gown, with an elderly reefer coat and a still more elderly blue sailor-hat upon her head. With her hands in the pockets of her elderly coat, she walked slowly on until she came to a seat and there she sat down and thought about the past. She wondered where Dick was now, she wondered whether he had grasped the truth that she had not thrown

him over of her own choice at the time of his last letter to her, she wondered if he was still in Brussels, she wondered if he ever thought about her, whether he loved her still? She did not know, she was not sure, she was as one risen from the dead; and she felt as if she had come back to all those who had known her aforetime, like a dead man gone clean out of mind.

But still it would be easy to find out if he were still in Brussels and it would be equally easy to find out whether he still cared anything about her. She jumped up and walked briskly back by the same way that she had come along the Avenue Louise, down the Rue de Namour, under the archway and across the Place Royale, where the statue of Godfrey de Bouillon stands.

Rosa was not yet down, so Betty walked into the little reading-room at the top of the stairs and began turning over the Brussels papers. But there was no particular information in any of them, nothing to tell her who was resident in the town and who not. She looked round the room

with thoughtful eyes, which presently fell upon a Postal Guide to the city.

"It's sure to be an old one," she said to herself, but she got up and crossed the room, taking it down from its place on the chimney shelf. What joy, it was only three months old! She turned the pages rapidly over, till she came to the English Legation. Sir Charles Stuart, Minister Plenipotentiary; First Secretary of Legation, the Hon. William Brunne; Second Secretary of Legation, Mr. Richard Whitehead; Military Attaché, Lord Southgate. But, in the whole list, there was no mention of him who had been and still was her dearly loved Dick.

She shut the book and restored it to its place, then went to the window and stood looking out over the broad Place, with its great statue and the handsome buildings opposite, with blank and unseeing eyes. He was gone, gone, gone, and, for her, Brussels was now as a city of the dead, and the sooner she was out of it the better it would be for her. She had nothing to remind her of the

Dick of the old days, not a scrap of Dick's handwriting, only a little faded photograph of a fair-haired young man in the uniform of the Grenadiers. No, it was no use her thinking about Dick any longer; he was gone. When she had died to the world, she had died to him also. She would never know now, whether he had sought for her and sought in vain, or whether he had believed that she had thrown him over, not caring to take the fatal step as she drew nearer to the day on which she must take it. She would never know whether he had simply forgotten her and had been glad to get out of his troth to her, and perhaps—it made her cold to think of it—he might even be dead himself. At all events, when she had left Brussels two years before, he had been the Military Attaché at the British Legation; she had just seen the list for that year and his name was no longer in it.

It never occurred to the girl that he might simply have been withdrawn, or that his time of being seconded had come to an end, and that he had

returned to his regiment. Nor did she even think of that contingency, until she and Rosa had left the fair and smiling city of Brussels far behind them, not, indeed, until they were on the steamer half-way between Ostend and Dover. Then it suddenly occurred to Betty, Rosa being downstairs prostrate in the agonies of sea-sickness, that such a thing was just possible, that she might hear of her Dick through an English Army List.

But she never breathed a word of her intention to her sister. Together they travelled up to London, when Rosa carefully titivated herself in the train and gradually assumed the color of a young woman made of ordinary flesh and blood, rather than the green object which had come off the boat.

Betty took no pains with her appearance, she was fresh and blooming as a rose, had enjoyed her trip across, and knew not the meaning of the words powder and puff, at least, I mean to say that she had had no acquaintance with these useful articles for the past two years.

Their mother and Gwen were waiting for them

at the quiet little hotel in Charles Street, where they generally put up when staying in town for a few days.

"Tell me," said Betty, as they turned out of Regent Street, "tell me, is mother altered at all?"

"No dear, not a bit; indeed, I really think she looks younger than ever," Rosa replied.

They got out of the cab and their luggage was taken charge of by the person, in neat uniform, who came to meet them.

"Is Mrs. McKenzie at home?"

"Yes, madam, both the ladies are at home," he replied.

"Then come this way, Betty," said Rosa.

She took hold of her sister's hand, fearing that she might feel some nervousness at meeting her mother again. But Betty had learned how to control her feelings, during the two years of what she called death, and Mrs. McKenzie was much the most inclined to be lachrymose of the two.

"My darling child," she cried, clasping her

arms around the tall slip of a girl and kissing her passionately, "how are you?"

"Thank you, dear mother," she said, "I am quite well in health and not at all sorry to be at home again. Gwen, dear, kiss me."

CHAPTER X.

TAKE UP YOUR BURDEN.

"Trying to mask his dismay by treating the subject with lightness,
Trying to smile and yet feeling his heart stand still in his bosom,
Just as a time-piece stops in a house that is stricken with lightning."

AFTER a stay in London of a fortnight, during which time Betty was supplied with a carefully thought out wardrobe fit for a young lady about to come out in society, Mrs. McKenzie and her daughters returned to the Rosary, Blankhampton.

Now until they were fast nearing Blankhampton by the express train which was taking them there, Betty had asked no questions about their friends or their mode of life. To Mrs. McKenzie the terrible reserve which seemed to enshroud her

daughter had come with a shock and a dreadful sense of wrong doing on her own part. She realized now that it was too late—that Betty was changed beyond all manner of recall. She had used to be, in those old days before the barbed shaft of love had winged its flight to part them, the most open and the most ingenuous young girl possible to imagine. With great strength of character, yes, that is true, yet so frank, so open, so witty, so full of fun, always up to some gay prank or other, innocent fun enough, yet with never a sting or bitter word or thought to wound any one. But now Betty was changed, and apparently irrevocably so.

For hours she was accustomed to sit perfectly still and quiet, doing nothing and to all appearance thinking of nothing, speaking with perfect good temper when spoken to, quite—as Gwen told her more than once—the personification of the little girl or big girl who should be seen and not heard.

"Ah," said Betty one day, in answer to some

such sally, " Madame Le Brun talked about fitting her charges to take their place with credit to her and satisfaction to their parents in the great world of fashion——"

" Old fool," interjected Gwen, whose opinion of her late preceptress was not a very high one.

" Superior, on the contrary, hated the world and all its works," Betty went on; " so far as she was concerned, so far as the poor wretched sisters were concerned, and so far as the still poorer and more wretched prisoners—I mean pupils—were concerned, the world was not for them. Kingdoms might wax and wane, kings marry or die, fashions rise and fall, great ministers of state rise into or fall out of favor, crops fail, floods deluge the land, whole towns be burned to ashes—they were all as one to the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart. Her business lay within the four walls of her Convent, the lives, hopes, fears, passions of those outside it had no more interest for her than those of the denizens of an ant-hill."

But it was not until the train from London to

Blankhampton was nearing the latter place that Betty asked any questions concerning the society in which her mother and sisters moved.

"What sort of people are there in Blankhampton?" she asked.

"Oh, a very good lot," returned Gwen—they were sitting in the opposite corner of the carriage to her mother and Rosa—"a very good lot. It depends, of course, entirely upon the set you're in; we happened to get into a very good set. It's a queer place is Blankhampton. Some people happen to go there with every qualification for becoming leaders of society in a small way, and nobody takes the slightest notice of them; and some people go there with a sort of feeling that they've been nobody in the past and that probably they'll be nobody in the future, yet somehow they catch on and become great people in Blankhampton. It's a very queer place."

"But of the people you know," persisted Betty. "You see it's so long," she added apologetically, "since I was at home that I know very little of

the people that you knew then; I doubt if I remember half a dozen names."

"Well, there's a Lady Lucifer, and there's Lady Vivian of Ingleby, and there's Lady Margaret Adair, and there's the new Bishop and his wife, and there's Mrs. Leith-Warminster,—Oh, they're a good lot."

"Oh, yes, but those are all fixed up people," said Betty; "I mean young people."

"Young people," repeated Gwen, "well, of course there's the usual sort of thing—there are the sons and daughters of the people one's mother knows; they're all about the same class as their parents, a little bit better some of them, but where improvement was most greatly needed I can't see that it is to be found. As to the men we know—why they are a very considerable quantity. First of all there is Captain Johnstone; he's an awfully nice fellow," said Gwen with a meditative, not to say rapt, expression.

"Captain Johnstone!" echoed Betty in a breathless voice.

"Yes, dear, he's in the 110th, that is to say he was at Blankhampton two years ago in the 110th, and he has just come back as A.D.C. to the General, and has plenty of time to spare and hasn't got to live in barracks and dine at mess and all that sort of thing. Oh, he's a very attractive man is Captain Johnstone."

"And you like him?" said Betty, with a catch in her voice.

"Like him—oh, my dear—I don't mind telling you," said Gwen turning up her eyes to the ceiling of the carriage, "I'm awfully gone on him. He's so handsome and he's so nice in every way. I liked him awfully two years ago when he was with the 110th, but now that he's come back for at least five years, unless he or the General gets promotion, I'm simply in heavenly bliss. Of course he has to trot round a good bit after the General's wife, but equally of course, poor thing, she isn't the kind of woman that would get much attention without an A.D.C. of her husband's to trot after her as part of his duty."

For a moment there was dead silence. Gwen gazed fixedly out of the window, thinking that she saw Captain Johnstone's handsome features reflected in the passing landscape. Betty sat still, turned as to stone, wondering if, after all her weary waiting, she was to have the pain of seeing her dear Dick make love to her equally dear sister. Did I say equally dear? Well, I did not mean quite to express *that*,——but to one of her dear sisters.

She pulled herself together with a great effort and asked about other people in the town, keeping Gwen's mind quite clear of any idea that she had even heard of Captain Johnstone before in all her life. And when they got home the first thing, naturally, that the two elder girls did was to fly to the hall table and see what cards had been left during their absence. There were a good many, and the one nearest to the edge of the table bore the name of Captain F. R. Johnstone, and below the name a few reproachful words scribbled in

pencil, "*I thought you would have been home before this.*"

Betty put the card down as if it had burned her, and turning to Rosa said in a strange and cold voice, "Rosey, which room am I to sleep in; am I to have one to myself or not?"

"Certainly, dear child," cried her mother, answering for her daughter, "your room is all ready and very pretty. Rosey, take her up and show it to her. I shall be dreadfully disappointed if you do not appreciate it."

"I shall love it, mother," responded Betty, in a strangled voice.

I could not say whether Gwen sent a little note down to the handsome and popular A.D.C.'s chambers, which would let him know that they had returned, but on the following day he called at the Rosary. It was rather an odd coincidence, seeing that he had called but a few days previously. He did not call alone; he was accompanied by his brother, Lord Southgate, and when he was announced, Betty happened to be in the study with

her mother, doing something in the way of answering notes, which, naturally enough, was considered the duty of the latest home comer.

"Oh, well, dear, we won't go for a few minutes," said her mother pleasantly: "you see Captain Johnstone is so devoted to dear Gwen that I expect to receive a little visit from him almost any day—I don't see what else can happen. I never interfere, once my girls come out. I never interfere with matters of this kind."

"Oh, I think you need not trouble about that, mother," said Betty carelessly. "If you like him and Gwen likes him and he likes Gwen, there is no more to be said, is there?"

"Lord Southgate, who comes so often with him," Mrs. McKenzie went on in a tone of admirably suppressed triumph, "is apparently equally devoted to Rosa. Really, I don't know that one could expect a more brilliant match for each of one's daughters. He is quite as nice as Captain Johnstone, and of course very well off and very good-looking and all that, and he and Rosey are great

friends. He seems to me to stay a good deal here with Captain Johnstone, but I think the attraction lies more in the direction of the Rosary than it does in St. Thomas's Street, where Captain Johnstone's chambers are."

"I daresay," said Betty, who was too sick at heart on her own account to feel anything but indifference as to her sister's love affairs.

"Now, dear," said Mrs. McKenzie blandly, "if you will answer all those letters in the affirmative and say 'no' to all the others. Say it nicely, dear: 'Mother is very sorry, but she has faithfully promised to do something on that day, and so will not be able to come to your party,' nothing rougher than that, my child; it doesn't do to offend people in a little place like Blankhampton."

So Betty began writing the notes, and presently Mrs. McKenzie sailed away, saying, that she really must not leave the young people alone any longer.

"But come in, darling, when tea is ready, whether you have finished or not—such a relief to have these notes done for me by my girls!"

And curiously enough it happened that Betty was just writing the address of the last little note —a refusal—when Parker came in to say that she had taken tea into the drawing-room.

"Very well, Parker," said she, "I will go."

But she did not go straight to the drawing-room. She went upstairs to her own room and washed her hands, bathed her hot temples with scent, and then held them against the cool glass of the window pane. Then feeling that she must be brave and meet the awful wrench which was before her without showing any of the white feather signs, she took her courage in both hands and went down to the drawing-room. It was cold, chill, dusk outside, but the drawing-room was warmly and softly lighted, and a pleasant fire blazed upon the hearth.

Captain Johnstone was sitting talking to Mrs. McKenzie with his back to the door. It was a fair head, and Betty's heart danced so in her bosom, and such strange weird shapes came floating in front of her eyes, that she never doubted for a moment but that it was her Dick.

"And this is my third daughter, Betty," said Mrs. McKenzie in a bland and urbane tone.

The stranger got up instantly and held out a very friendly hand, such a friendly hand as a man would hold out to his sweetheart's sister whom he had never seen.

"I am so charmed to meet you," he said pleasantly.

Betty put a little clay cold hand into his, and in a measure held on to him for support, for *it was not Dick*, and the revulsion of feeling was almost too much for the girl, in spite of her long training in acquiring self-control.

"You are very cold," he said in his kind, interested tones.

"Just a little cold," she said, trying to smile, but looking very white and drawn.

"Don't you feel well, dear?" asked Gwen.

"Not very bright," answered Betty, bravely, "a cup of tea will do me good. It's all right—oh, don't take any notice of me, I'm not going to faint or anything of that kind—I felt sick coming into

this warm light room a little after being up-stairs. I'm all right."

She sat down and took the cup of tea which he handed to her, but refused to eat anything with it. And presently, as she drank the hot beverage, she came more to her own senses and was able to look at her sister's admirer with differently interested eyes to those with which she had looked at him before. She saw then how easily she might have been mistaken. He was not unlike her Dick, for he was tall and fair, with a determined turn of the chin and a gracious ease of manner which undoubtedly had helped to make him one of the most popular men in Blankhampton.

"Dear me," said Mrs. McKenzie to Gwen, "I wonder where your sister and Lord Southgate are?"

"Oh, don't disturb them, Mrs. McKenzie," said Captain Johnstone good-naturedly.

"Well, that's very pretty at a dance," said the mother with an amused laugh, "but when it is afternoon tea and hot buttered muffins, I don't

think that it's kind to let people idle about a damp conservatory, or some equally uncomfortable or detrimental place, do you?"

"Oh, I don't know," he returned, "I think if I was happy I'd rather be left at the bottom of a well than be brought up to all the tea and muffins in the world."

"But I don't know that they are happy," said Mrs. McKenzie smiling.

"I hear their voices," said Gwen, "they are coming."

There was a faint light glimmering in the conservatory, which lay between the drawing-room and the morning-room. Rosa McKenzie opened the door and came in followed by a tall, fair-haired man.

"Oh, fancy your not letting us know that tea was ready—how detestable of you," she said speaking to them generally. "Lord Southgate, let me introduce you to my much-beloved sister, Betty."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PAIN OF AN OLD WOUND.

"Set thy heart aright and constantly endure."

FOR a moment there was profound silence, then Betty, taught in the school of patience to endure, looked up into the eyes of the only man that she had ever loved and held out her hand to him.

"I am very pleased to meet you," she said in an ice cold voice.

"*And I*," came from between his teeth.

But Betty turned abruptly away and went back to the tea-table, where she sat down by Gwen, who was presiding there, and began to turn her teaspoon idly round and round in her cup.

Rosa, who had seen nothing, gathered nothing of the tragedy which had taken place between these

two, sat down on a settee not far from the table, and made a gesture to Lord Southgate that he should come and sit beside her.

"I do think it was too bad of you not to let us know that tea was ready," she went on in a gay, laughing voice. "Don't you think so, Lord Southgate?"

"Oh, I do," he said promptly, trying hard to speak in a natural voice. "Frank, old fellow, I think it was real mean of you."

"Yes, Dick, always pitch into the younger son. That's the worst of being a younger son," Captain Johnstone went on to the room in general; "he's a sort of everlasting fag to his swell of an elder brother."

And then Betty knew why this lover of Gwen's had deceived her for a moment into thinking that he was Dick, for he and Dick were brothers.

"My dear chap," said Lord Southgate, as he fetched Rosa's cup of tea, trying to catch a glance of Betty's eyes the while, "you've had the best of it all along. I've got the title and——"

"And the money," put in Captain Johnstone quietly.

"Yes, yes, the money, but *that's* not everything."

Then he took his own cup of tea, seeing that Betty resolutely avoided looking at him, and sat down on the settee beside handsome Rosa.

"By the by, Mrs. McKenzie," he said after a minute or so, changing his tone to one of ordinary everyday gravity, "my brother and I secured seats at the theatre to-night; it is almost the end of the pantomime, and I assure you it's really clipping, Won't you give us the pleasure of going there with us?"

"I shall be charmed," said Mrs. McKenzie, "quite charmed."

"I was very lucky to get eight seats and I have asked two other men—Bertie Williams and Sir John Netherdale—won't you dine with me early at the hotel before we go to the theatre?"

"Oh, it would be most pleasant," said Mc-Kenzie graciously, "but do you mean all of us?"

He looked round with an odd little smile.

"Why, yes," he said, "which of you could I leave out?"

It seemed like an eternity to Betty before they betook themselves away; but in reality it was not very long, for Captain Johnstone's dog-cart came round to the door in less than half-an-hour after he and she had met for the first time.

How hard he tried to get just one word alone with Betty; but it was impossible. She never raised her eyes to his; she answered his remarks and questions only in monosyllables, and the little hand that she gave him when he went away—although as he said by way of excuse it was but *au revoir* instead of good-bye—might have been the hand of a dead girl.

"Is that," said he to his brother as they drove along the dusky lanes, "is that the sister you told me about, Frank—the one that was at school in Brussels?"

"Yes, and isn't she pretty?"

"Pretty? I shouldn't have thought of using the term pretty to her—no, I don't call her pretty,"

said Lord Southgate decidedly. "How long has she been at home?"

"Came home yesterday, I think."

"Where has she been?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, old chap—Brussels, I believe.

"I don't think that she's been in Brussels, but, of course I don't know. You really admire Gwen?"

"Oh yes, really and truly."

"And I think Gwen likes you, old chap. I hope," with an affectionate little squeeze of the elbow nearest to him. "I hope that you'll be happy when you get her, and I should like to be the first to congratulate you."

"Thank you, old fellow," said Captain Johnstone. And then turning in his seat he looked at his brother sharply and searchingly. "Dick, old chap," he said anxiously, "you don't seem over and above bright to-night—what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Lord Southgate, looking steadily over the horse's ears.

"Yet you don't look like yourself—I'm sure something's wrong—what is it, old man? Haven't you and the handsome Rosa got along as well as you generally do?"

"Better," said he, bitterly, "I wish we didn't get along quite so well."

"Oh, for shame, Dick, my dear fellow, getting a peerage has been the ruin of you; upon my word for two years past you haven't been the same man that you used to be—Lord, what fun you were when you were only Dick Johnstone of the old Grenadiers, with all your work cut out, to keep off your wits and things."

"I can't help it, old fellow," said Lord Southgate, rather humbly, "responsibilities are apt to get too much for us, and it isn't all beer and skittles being a peer of the British realm that I can promise you."

"But I thought, Dick, that you were greatly taken with Miss McKenzie."

"You thought wrong,——Frank, I never was."

"Oh,——but I say, old chap, her mother thinks so."

"I can't help what her mother thinks."

"But look here, old fellow, you might just oblige me in one way."

"I will if I can."

"Well, you needn't cool off till I've got settled, need you?"

At this Lord Southgate simply burst out laughing.

"My dear fellow, you mustn't ask me to compromise myself with a lady because you want to get engaged to her sister. I don't think that's quite the kind of manners one expects from you."

"Why, then, my dear chap, did you go and ask them all to a dinner party to-night and why get the theatre tickets—that's what I want to know?"

"Oh, I wanted to make things easy for you, perhaps. Anyway, make the most of your time to-night—make hay while the sun shines. Now here we are, I'll get down, and be sure you're not later than ten minutes past seven."

How strange it was! Betty, at home in the little pink room that had been got ready specially for her, was lying on her bed face down and stifling the hot tearless sobs by pressing her face down close against her pillow, and two minutes after the brothers had parted at the door of the hotel, Dick had on reaching his room turned roughly to his man and told him he shouldn't want him again at present, and had dropped upon the chair nearest to the dressing-table and was hiding his face upon his arms. I won't say that the man was actually crying, or that he was even sobbing, as the girl who loved him was doing at that very moment, but after two weary years they had met again, God help them both, with cold averted eyes on one side and doubt or sickening dread on the other. Oh, Dick,—oh, Betty,—what an ending to a love story so unselfish, so tender, so faithful and so true as the story which those two had plighted under the trees of the Avenue Louise, little more than two years agone!

Well, it is good for us that in very few rela-

tions of life can we indulge ourselves in the luxury of grief. Neither of those two could afford to do so at that moment. Lord Southgate had asked seven people to dine with him; he was bound to dress and be ready to receive them. And Betty was going out to her first dinner party as a society lady, to meet her old love Dick in the new guise of her favorite sister's lover!

I don't know how the girl dressed and made herself presentable in the time that she had in which to do so. She had not wept certainly, so that her eyes were neither red nor swollen, but her face blanched of its lovely color was drawn and lined with pain, her eyes set in black rings and dilated with the anguish of the past hour. Presentable she could not make herself in one sense, although she was beautifully dressed, and her mother exclaimed at her appearance, when she met her later on in the hall.

Only Gwen, under cover of the friendly darkness of the cab which took them to the hotel, took hold of her younger sister's hand and held it tenderly

in her own. Gwen knew; the other two never even suspected. Oh, well—well, when I say that Gwen knew, I do not mean to convey that she knew that Lord Southgate was the same man who had written the letter which had gained for Betty two years' imprisonment and worse than imprisonment. Not at all, not for a moment. But she did know that something had gone grievously wrong with Betty's heart; she knew it by her own.

"Mrs. McKenzie," said Lord Southgate, "you will take the head of the table, will you not?"

So he contrived to have Rosa on one side of him and Betty on the other, and on Betty's other hand was young Mr. Bertie Williams, a gay and insouciant young gentleman, belonging to the cavalry regiment then quartered at Blankhampton. But not one word beyond the barest replies to his questions and remarks could Lord Southgate extract from Betty. To him, with no idea having entered his head of marrying Rosa McKenzie, there seemed no reason that she could not take up their inter-

rupted love story just where it had been so cruelly brought to an end; to Betty, believing that he was her sister's choice, believing that he had of his own free will chosen Rosa as his future wife, he was as much a stranger as if they had never met before.

Only once, indeed, did he almost succeed in breaking down the wall of ice and reserve that she had reared between them; for as if a sudden memory had come to him of that sweet-shop in the Rue de Namour, he suddenly stretched forth a long arm and took a dish of bonbons from the table.

"Miss Betty," he said, "won't you have some sweetmeats?"

She looked up at him then and shook her head.

"No," she said, "I haven't eaten sweetmeats for years."

And Rosa on the other side of the table, hearing her answer and remembering the girl's excellent and healthy appetite for all sorts and conditions of sweetmeats but a fortnight previously when they

were wandering about Brussels, wondered what the strange answer could possibly mean.

"Why, Betty!" she cried almost involuntarily.

Betty looked up at her with those same anguished eyes which were almost breaking the heart of the man who sat between them.

"I should have said except once," she answered.

"Then why not twice?" said Lord Southgate eagerly.

"I couldn't eat one to-night," she answered, "and I think," she went on, in a very low voice, "that sweetmeats are very bad for us."

Oh, what an evening of agony it was! Not pain, not anger, not misunderstanding exactly, but of sheer agony and anguish indescribable.

He contrived again that he should sit next Betty at the theatre; indeed once more he sat between Betty and Rosa. They had an entire row of the dress circle, which is the most select part of the theatre at Blankhampton. He did manage it very cleverly. Sir John Netherdale, who was a bold and burly squire and mighty hunter, he sent in first, then

Mrs. McKenzie, then Bertie Williams, then Rosa, then himself, then Betty, then Captain Johnstone, and last of all Gwen McKenzie. Now as a matter of fact, Mrs. McKenzie and Sir John Netherdale were by way of being quite intimate friends. She said that he was a charming man, quite a type of the old English gentleman; and he said, "By Jove, she's one of the most sensible women that I've ever known; it's almost impossible to believe that she's got a handful of grown-up daughters." So he having nobody on his right hand did not turn his attention from Mrs. McKenzie, and Mrs. McKenzie naturally did not take very much interest in young Bertie Williams, who was a charming boy about three or four and twenty. Now, naturally enough, Mr. Bertie Williams did not see sitting mum-chance between Mrs. McKenzie and Miss Rosa, so he so determinedly and persistently talked to Rosa, that she was not able to get more than a word or two with Lord Southgate during the whole evening, and as Lord Southgate's brother was equally well occupied with Gwen McKenzie,

it became almost unavoidable that Betty and her old lover should, so to speak, pass the time of day with one another.

Now Lord Southgate had never been a laggard in love, even when he was not by any means sure of coming in for the Southgate estates, and now that he was a nobleman with not a care in the world—of a sordid description, that is—he was not at all likely to show the white feather.

"Betty," he said to her in a whisper during one of the busiest scenes of the pantomime, "where have you been all this time—why did you never write to me—how was it you never let me have any answer to my last three or four letters?"

"I never got but one," Betty answered, "and it's too late to talk about that now."

"But tell me where have you been?" he persisted.

"I have been in prison," she said, with a shudder.

"But where?"

"At the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Pepinster," she replied.

"You don't say so! Do you know that Michel," naming the good-natured maid-servant, who had been their go-between while she was under Madame Le Brun's roof, "told me that everything had been found out, that you had refused to give up my name and that you had refused to say how you received my letters. I knew it was just like you, darling. And she told me that she could only believe that you had been taken to that beastly hole at Pepinster. And I wandered round and round and round that place, like a terrier dog watching a rat in a cage, and never a sign did I see of you."

"That was not at all unlikely," said Betty in a frozen voice, "because, you see, I was never once outside those walls for two whole years."

"And all on my account?" he said.

"All on your account," she replied.

"But, Betty, you don't blame me for it?"

"I blame you for nothing," she said in a choking voice. "Only the past has gone by forever, it can never come back again; things can never be as they were then, everything is altered, change has

fallen over the whole world—at least, over your world and mine—and after to-night, Lord Southgate, you must never speak to me again as you have spoken to me now. You must never speak to me any differently than you would have spoken to me if I were the stranger to you that my people think me."

"But why?" he asked.

"Oh," she cried in a voice of poignant pain, "you know why as well as I do."

CHAPTER XII.

THE HARDEST TASK OF ALL.

"Beware of losing heart in consequence of injury; for the bringing them back after flight is difficult."

THAT night Lord Southgate went back to his hotel pondering over what Betty had said, and wondering what she could possibly mean. He could hardly think it conceivable that she could feel resentful towards him for the fact that she had been immured in that dreadful convent during those two long years.

He had not very much time at his disposal, because his leave of absence from the English Legation in Brussels was not very long, nor had he very much time to think of what he could do; for, some half-hour after he had turned into his sitting-room and was smoking a cigarette and thinking of Betty, his brother came in with a rush and

a whirl and told him with many a hum and haw and a sort of half shame-faced pride, that he and Gwen had that night made up their minds to run in double harness together.

"Now, old chap, you'll do the last offices for me, won't you?" he said imploringly.

"What do you mean—best man? Of course," Southgate answered.

"Well, I didn't exactly mean best man," he said, "but you see old chap, it's a deuced awkward thing going and talking to a girl's mother about one's prospects and all that, and I thought you'd be the proper person, as head of the family, to just explain how things stand, eh?"

"I don't mind doing it," said Lord Southgate, good-naturedly, and with a wild wish that he could go and do likewise for himself and another of Mrs. McKenzie's daughters. "I'd better go up to-morrow afternoon, then, eh?"

"Oh, hadn't you better make it the morning?" asked Captain Johnstone rather awkwardly.

"No, I don't think I'd better make it the morn-

ing; I'd better make it about three o'clock in the afternoon, and then you can come along at tea-time, and you can hear all that there is to hear. I can tell you what the old lady'll say," he went on dryly, "she'll talk about her darling child, and she'll say that although she's got four of them she hasn't got one too many, and that she doesn't like parting with any of them, but that as she can hardly expect such girls not to leave the parent nest sooner or later—they always talk about the parent nest you know—that she'd as soon let her come to you as to anybody else she knows. That's about the tone of it."

"Dick, old chap," said Frank Johnstone in tones of concern, "there's something wrong with you. What is it?"

"Nothing, nothing—a little envious of you, that's all."

"But it's not Gwen, surely?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Well, you said this afternoon that it wasn't the other one."

"Did I? Well, I suppose I was right. Never mind me, I'm a little bit humped; I'm down in the dumps, I'm a little bit off color. One can't always be dancing about like a Will-o'-the-wisp, pretending one's as merry as a cricket when one isn't. Leave me alone, old chap, it's the kindest thing you can do for me. Don't worry about her; if she's all right, take my word for it the old lady's all right too. I'll go up there first thing after lunch to-morrow and put it all right for you; you come up to tea and then I'll give you my blessing."

So the brothers parted for the night and Lord Southgate sat down again before the fire, and, lighting a fresh cigarette, fell to thinking of Betty again.

I may as well confess that he was more in love with Betty than ever. Although the effect upon her mind of the last two years had been decidedly bad, the effect upon her body had been quite the opposite of that. She had been very pale that evening, but it was from excessive emotion rather than from lack of health.

And when Lord Southgate went up to the Rosary on the following day just after lunch, he happened to meet her in the hall as he was being shown into the drawing-room. She was as blooming as a rose, dressed in a pretty light tweed frock made by a good tailor, and as smart as pink and white striped collar and cuffs and a white silk tie could make her. To his intense surprise, she put out a perfectly frank and friendly hand and said in a bright and friendly tone, "Oh, is that you, Lord Southgate, how do you do? Nice bright day, isn't it?"

"Very," said he in a tone intended to convey deep reproach.

"Come to see my mother?" she asked, "or who?"

"To see your mother on business," he said quietly; indeed the man was hurt by the utter indifference of her manner.

"Oh, you'd better take Lord Southgate into the morning-room, my mother is there, Parker," said Betty promptly.

"Yes, Miss Betty," answered Parker.

So Lord Southgate was hurried off into the morning-room before he had time even to cast a look of reproach into Betty's eyes; and how was he to know that Betty turned and fled up the stairs down which she had just come; that she shut herself up in her room and went through one of those awful storms of silent agony, the agony that knows not the relief of tears. How was he to know that?

While he was talking business on his brother's account with Mrs. McKenzie he saw her go past the window with a couple of big dogs at her heels and a demure gray cat in their wake. She looked so young, so straight and tall, with her bright fair hair, her glorious complexion, and her great gray bright eyes, and, unfortunately for Lord Southgate's peace of mind, she looked heartless also. He quite made up his mind during the time that he was talking settlements and such like dry details over with Mrs. McKenzie and discanting on his brother's future prospects, that he would not

remain to afternoon tea that day, and yet when Mrs. McKenzie got up from her chair at the writing-table and said, with a glance at the clock on the chimney shelf, "Ah, it's time for tea—you'll stop and have a cup of course," yet he was not then man enough, or cold enough, or cruel enough, or what you will, to keep the promise which he had made to himself that he would resolutely depart from the house.

Not a bit of it. He went in to tea and, in the absence of his brother, he had the honor of handing the various cups to the various ladies assembled. Rosa as a matter of fact was out, and Sir John Netherdale soon afterwards came in and monopolized Mrs. McKenzie; so, as he had and could be supposed to have no interest in Gwen, he carried his own cup of tea to the corner of the wide sofa on which Betty had ensconced herself.

"Is this your little dog, Miss Betty?" he asked, stroking the little Maltese which was lying beside her.

"No," she answered looking at him with her beautiful eyes, "it belongs to Rosey."

"Oh," he said, still stroking it, "it's a nice little fellow. Flossie, you know me, don't you?" at which the dog put up a soft little head and waved a sort of white feather in the other direction.

"I see," said Betty, "that he knows you very well."

They talked certainly on all manner of subjects —of the Academy which she had just seen for the first time, on her ideas about Blankhampton, on the Wiertz Musée in Brussels.

"You have been there?" he said, in a tone that had something in it of inquiry.

"Oh, yes," she said, feeling as if she would break out into floods of tears with every moment, for during those memorable Christmas holidays when she had been allowed by her mother's friends, with the most charming ideas of laxity as to young girls' bringing up, to run about the town as she liked, she had met him in that charming little gallery over and over again.

The Wiertz Musée in Brussels is pretty much what the Doré Gallery is in London—a place visited principally by strangers.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I have been there more than once. It is a place I don't like—it gives me the horrors."

"You think you will like Blankhampton?" he asked politely.

"Oh, yes; why not?" she said.

"One never knows," he responded. "When one has lived a good deal abroad, one finds the manners and customs of people at home so changed and so different to what they were. I am going back to Brussels next week."

"Oh, really," said Betty, "you are——"

"Yes," he said, "I am still in the same position as I was, except that my private circumstances are, as you know, a good deal altered. I don't however remain there much longer, and I am leaving the service when my time at Brussels comes to an end."

For some minutes the girl sat almost holding

her breath for fear of giving way. Unconsciously her fingers, nervous and trembling strayed in and out among the snowy silken curls of the little Maltese. At last, however, the poor little animal could stand it no longer and uttered a miserable yelp of dissatisfaction and pain.

"Oh, dear," cried Betty, seizing the little thing in her hands and holding it up to her throat, "did I hurt you, my poor little Flossie—you know I wouldn't hurt you for the world—what could I have been thinking about? It was all your fault, Lord Southgate, for making me think of that horrid Wiertz Musée, which is enough to give one fits of the blues and the horrors for the rest of one's natural life."

"I am very sorry if I reminded you of a disagreeable past, Miss Betty," said he meekly, "I assure you I did it quite in ignorance; for the little dog's sake I would not have done so if I had thought you disliked the place so much."

"I think, Betty," said Mrs. McKenzie when their visitors had gone, "that you and Lord

Southgate do not get on very well together?"

"Not very well, mother," answered Betty brusquely.

"It is a pity, dear. If he becomes your brother-in-law it will be such a pity if you do not get on with him. You should try to have a little more of the society smoothness about your manner."

"Dear mother," said Betty, looking straight into her mother's eyes, "there was no society smoothness at the Convent of the Sacred Heart. Everything there was stern and plain, a spade was called a spade—even at the most awkward moments—and to have what you call 'society smoothness of manner' the good sisters there call *telling lies*. My dear mother, if you wanted me to have the same society smoothness of manner as my sisters, you shouldn't have taken and buried me in the Convent of the Sacred Heart."

"Betty, don't reproach me!" Mrs. McKenzie cried.

"Dear mother," said Betty, "I do not reproach

you; I have no wish to do so. I believe with all my heart that you acted for the best, but you must not grumble, dear, when I fall short in those graces which Madame, with all her deceitfulness and all her shallowness, was such an adept at teaching to her pupils. As to Lord Southgate—he is very nice, very good-looking, and he is to be my brother-in-law. I have no fault to find with him whatever—perhaps he does not like me—perhaps I do not interest him—perhaps he does not interest me. Some day," Betty went on holding her head very high and speaking in a suspiciously clear and distinct voice, "some day we may get quite fond of each other."

"I am sure, darling," said Mrs. McKenzie, indulgently, "there is no reason why you should not be quite fond of each other now."

"No, mother, no reason at all. I have come back, dear," she cried, dropping on her knees beside her mother's chair, "I have come back very sorry for the past, very anxious to do everything that will please you in the future, and if it will

please you that I shall become very fond of Lord Southgate, I will do my best to do so."

"That is my good child," said Mrs. McKenzie a little tearfully. She was a woman who could not bear scenes, they always made her either hard or Niobe-like. "I know that you will do everything —I know, dearest, that I was misguided in sending you to that convent—the girls have convinced me of that—but I acted at the time as I thought was for the best. And you would not confide in me, Betty, although I came up to you that morning alone, hoping that you might tell me everything and feeling even that I would try to arrange that marriage upon which your mind was set if it were possible."

"Much better not, mother," cried Betty with a wild laugh, "much better not. What is, is best. Things might have been worse if I had married that man. But don't ask me for his name, mother, I couldn't speak it, and, mother dear, leave me to marry or not marry in my own time. That is all I ask of you—the only favor I beg of you. And

to please you, dear, and to show you that I really mean every word that I say, I will try and like Lord Southgate as much as even you could wish."

CHAPTER XIII.

ATCHAFALAYA.

"Feeling is deep and still; and the word that floats on the surface
Is as the tossing buoy, that betrays where the anchor is hidden."

IT is one thing to make a promise, a promise born of the excitement of the moment, and it is quite another thing to keep it.

Betty McKenzie had spoken in all good faith when she had promised her mother that she would try and like Lord Southgate as much as even she could wish. But it was quite another matter, deep shrined in her heart as Lord Southgate's image was, to like him in a totally different way, to like him as a prospective brother-in-law.

Strangely enough, Rosa said nothing of him, never assumed any airs on account of his attentions

to her, never spoke with pleasure of being with him, seemed indeed to be drifting on a current of life just as fate would have it.

And yet there was no doubt about the position of Lord Southgate in that charming household. Mrs. McKenzie welcomed him with the fond eye of a mother-in-law before her daughter has been to the altar. They are so different, the mothers-in-law before the ceremony and the mothers-in-law afterwards! She was a little cool about Gwen's choice without saying it in plain English, she hinted that she would have liked all her daughters to marry elder sons.

"Oh, very much in love with each other," she said to one or two people, who congratulated her on the marriage, "but still Captain Johnstone is *only* a younger son after all. I would much rather that my daughter had married more substantially."

But Lord Southgate, like the King, could do no wrong in Mrs. McKenzie's eyes. He came and went to the villa as he liked, and it must be owned that he came and went duly and truly.

"I have only a few days further leave of absence, Mrs. McKenzie," he said to her one day by way in apology for having turned up again, "and I hope you will forgive me and let me make the most of my time."

"Oh, come when you like," she said kindly, "you are always welcome here. When we next come to Brussels, we will come and have tea with you or some gay festivity of that kind, eh, Betty?"

It happened that Betty was the only one of them left at home that afternoon. The other two girls had gone under the chaperonage of Lady Lucifer to a gay lunch-party at the Cavalry Barracks. Lord Southgate had been asked, but had not availed himself of the invitation.

"We will quite get you to do the honors of Brussels to us," said Mrs. McKenzie blandly; "will we not, Betty?"

"I don't know, mother," said Betty, in a very cold voice, "I am not fond of Brussels. I don't think, if one of the others will go with you when you next want to go there, that I shall put you to

the trouble and expense of taking me there. I like Blankhampton much better."

She did not look at Lord Southgate, she did not look at her mother, she apparently spoke only to the Persian cat which was purring happily on her knee.

"*Don't* you like Brussels, Miss Betty?" said Lord Southgate in an appealing tone.

Then she looked at him.

"No," she said, "I cannot bear Brussels."

"Oh, well, Betty was at school there," said Mrs. McKenzie, in a bland and indulgent tone, "and I think that girls very often don't like the places where they have been at school. You will like it next time, my dear; it will be quite different."

"Are you thinking of coming out this winter?" he asked.

"Oh, no, not this winter. You see I could not very well take Betty there again—even if you wanted to go, dear, that is," in an aside to Betty —"until she has been presented, and she is not to

be presented until next season. Another year perhaps, we shall see."

"Ah, well, I shall not be there then," he said rather sadly.

"Really? Then are you giving up your post, or sending in your papers? Or what are you going to do?"

"Oh, I'm not going on with the service. I shall just stay my time out in Brussels—it's about three months longer—and then I shall send in my papers and retire. I could not go back to regimental life, not even in the Guards."

"Really. Well then, I suppose you'll be turning into the typical country squire and you'll look after your estates—possibly marry—and settle down."

"And become quite a reformed character," put in Lord Southgate in a bitter tone.

But Mrs. McKenzie either did not or would not see it. Betty did.

"It is one thing to say you will be a reformed character," she said, leaning back in her chair and

stroking the soft fur of the pussy, "and it is quite another thing to be one."

"Yes, Miss Betty," he answered, "nobody is more thoroughly aware of that fact than I am."

He had made his appearance very early in the afternoon, and as Mrs. McKenzie had an urgent visit from a dressmaker respecting a frock for one of the young ladies, she was obliged to leave them alone together for a little time.

Lord Southgate made the most of his opportunity. He crossed the room and sat down upon the sofa, upon which Betty was sitting.

"Betty," he asked, passionately, "*why* have you altered so?"

"What did I tell you the last time that you spoke to me about this?" she said, in a very cold and stately voice. "Why do you try to re-open that old affair, that is over and done with forever? Don't you understand that in my position, I cannot listen to you for a moment—you are my——" she stopped for a word, conscious that he had not yet actually spoken out to Rosa—"you are my——"

"Your lover," he put in.

"You were once," she responded quietly, "but *not* now—oh, *not* now. Listen to me, Lord Southgate," she cried, lifting her eyes boldly to his and speaking in a very clear and ringing voice, "when I told you the other day that I meant the past to be at an end forever between us, I spoke only the plain and sober truth. I am quite willing to meet you in my mother's house like this, to be civil pleasant, ever friendly towards you, but that is only for my—" she was going to say "for my sister's sake," then suddenly changed the word at the last moment and continued—"for the sake of my people. You must understand clearly and irrevocably, now and for all time, that when you and I happen to find ourselves unavoidably alone together, *we have no past*—still less have we ANY FUTURE. No, do not speak," she cried, putting up her hand with an imperative gesture seeing that he was about to interrupt her, "do not speak. What might have been was not and can never be now. What will be, has no relation to what might have been. I

don't ask this," she went on, in a tone of dignity, "as a favor; I insist upon it by the right of all that I have suffered during the past two years for your sake."

"But why?" he began, eagerly.

"Oh, don't ask why," she interrupted, fiercely, "there is no why between you and me—we are as much apart as if Death himself had come between us. If you have any tender recollection of that past foolish time, you will prove it to me best by leaving me absolutely in peace, absolutely in forgetfulness by remembering that everything is changed between us. I loved Dick Johnstone, yes, yes, with all my heart and soul; for Lord Southgate I have no feeling that is not a feeling of the deepest pain. Oh, if you have ever loved me, be merciful to me now and let me live in peace, without one other such scene as this. I did what was wrong in the past—for it was wrong and you know it—and I have suffered for it. I mean to try in the future that is so near in front of us, to do something more than merely right. Can't you

understand that I am thankful that my mother does not especially want to take me back to Brussels now—can't you understand that I shall be glad when you are gone, when I know that there is no chance of your being left alone with me to touch upon the old wound, as you have torn it open to-day? Oh, Dick," she went on, "to think that I should ever have to ask you for mercy—to leave me in a little peace—to make my life a little less hard than you are making it for me now."

"But you won't let me speak," he cried.

"Speak—what is the object of your speaking—what good can you do by speaking? You have cast your life and there is nothing more to say about it."

Before he could answer her Mrs. McKenzie returned to the room with profuse apologies for having been so long away, she knew but too well that Betty did not like being left alone with Lord Southgate—at least she knew that Betty did not particularly like him, and she guessed that she

would not be any too pleased at being left for half-an-hour alone in his company.

"Well," she said in her bland smooth voice—the voice that Betty had told her that the good sisters of the Convent of the Sacred Heart would uncompromisingly call lying—"well, I hope you two young people have been amusing each other. Is my daughter a good hostess, Lord Southgate—you see, she has been such a short time home from school, that I do not know her capacity in that way."

"I should imagine," said he, "that Miss Betty *could be* a very delightful hostess, if she wished to be so."

"I'm afraid," said Betty, looking at him with angry eyes for thus giving her away to her mother, "I'm afraid Lord Southgate and I have talked too much—forgive me—I will not forget myself in that way again."

"Oh I did not mean that," he said politely.

"No, no, it does not matter what you mean or what I mean. My mother is a perfect hostess,

so that with her you will be or ought to be perfectly happy."

He would have gone away almost immediately, but Mrs. McKenzie would not hear of it.

"Oh, stay a little while. We will have tea and the girls will be back presently; they will be so disappointed if you do not wait to see them."

So Lord Southgate waited without a word to see the two elder daughters of the house, who came in by and by bringing Lady Lucifer with them and also Captain Johnstone and another man. Betty watching with keen eyes—and are any eyes as keen as those of a love that has gone wrong?—thought that he was disappointed at the coming of the second man, for he confined his attention entirely to Lady Lucifer, who was a pretty and particularly bright and easy-mannered little woman. Of Rosa he scarcely took any notice, nor indeed did Rosa of him. When they had all departed, Mrs. McKenzie reproached her eldest daughter gently for her thoughtlessness; indeed she went so far as

to call it her unkindness in having so frightfully neglected her admirer.

"Oh, mother," cried Rosa, imploringly, "don't worry me about the man—he was all right—he thinks no end of Lady Lucifer."

"But, my dear, he waited to see you."

"Then, my dear mother," said Rosa, with the delightful impertinence of a pretty woman, "he will be all the more anxious to see me to-morrow or next day. Betty, my dear sister, be thankful that you are not the eldest daughter of that lady. When you are the eldest of two—that is to say when Gwen and I have been harried into marrying somebody or other——"

"I'm not going to be harried into marrying anybody," cried Gwen indignantly, "if you mean Frank, I am absolutely eager to marry him, and he's absolutely eager to marry me. Don't put yourself in the same battle-field as I am, my dear, because if you do you make a mistake. I'm sure mother never harried me into marrying Frank."

"Never, my dear," said Mrs. McKenzie with the

unctuous pride of a mother who is a firm believer in the charms of her daughter. "I should hope that I have no need to harry my daughters into marrying anybody; still, I do think that you treat Lord Southgate very badly."

"Oh yes, dear mother, but he will get over it," said Rosa.

"If you mean to accept him I think you might at least be civil to him, and if you don't mean to marry him I think you ought to choke him off—I mean, I think you ought not to encourage him at all."

"I'm sure I 'choked' him off enough this afternoon," said Rosa with amazing conceit. "Girls, I hope you marked our mother's delightful modern English."

Well, you can imagine the effect of all this upon our poor love-sick Betty, who loved this man every inch of him as she never had loved and never would love any other man again as long as she lived.

They were going to a dance that night and al-

though Betty pleaded that three girls were too many for her mother to take out, that she was not regularly out and didn't care in the least about going, Mrs. McKenzie and the two girls were all equally insistant upon her going with them.

"Why shouldn't you go?" asked Rosa, looking at her with wide open eyes of astonishment, "it's a big house, you've specially been asked, you've got a lovely dress, you're looking brilliantly well, and you're only just beginning to enjoy yourself—as if we shouldn't be welcome anywhere!"

"It's not that," said Betty.

"Well, then, what is it? It's because you're shy, you foolish child. Really, Betty, you've been kept in the background so long that you must make an effort, darling, and get over it. And mother will be so hurt if you don't go."

"Do you think she will?" asked Betty.

"Oh yes, dear, I'm sure of it—she'll think you've got all sorts of things in your mind that you really have not and never will have there. Come now, darling, say you will, just to please me."

CHAPTER XIV.

A GOLDEN CHANCE.

"No good or lovely thing exists in this world without its corresponding darkness."

WELL, to please Rosa, the one who had rescued her from her seemingly interminable exile, Betty McKenzie in an evil moment promised that she would go to this dance upon which her sister had so set her heart.

She was not a girl who cried—I have said so before—but she went through an hour of anguish in her own room before she gave a thought to her toilet for the evening. And when she came into the hall, dressed in a charming white gown neither too rich nor too plain, neither too short nor too long, but just that middle way which is perfection they never noticed in the colored light of the lamp how pale and wan she was looking.

Almost the first person whom they saw when they got into the ball-room was Lord Southgate. He came up to the mother and sisters with the manner of one who had a right to do so, asked Rosa first for a couple of dances, then Gwen for one if she could spare it, then turned boldly to Betty and said, "I hope as this is your first dance that you will honor me."

And what could Betty do under the very eyes of her mother who had not long before reproached her for not being sufficiently friendly in her manner towards Lord Southgate? She had no choice but to murmur the usual formula with which young ladies intimate to young men that they will be pleased to dance with them. She stood by meekly while he scrawled a great "D" upon the space against the next dance.

"I suppose I may take another?" he said under his breath.

She looked up at him half in reproach, half in fear.

"Don't be afraid," he muttered in the same

brusque tones, "I won't say a single word to offend you." Then seeing acquiescence in her face, or what he took for acquiescence, he boldly scrawled the same initial against two other dances.

It was greatly to Mrs. McKenzie's surprise that she saw her youngest daughter go away and dance the very next waltz with Lord Southgate. He danced to perfection, and Betty, in spite of her having been immured at the convent where such things as dancing and evening dresses were unknown, also danced marvellously well.

"Your step suits mine," he said, presently.

"Yes," she answered, simply.

She was thinking in that moment of anguish—for no lesser word will describe the torture which the girl was suffering—of the old nursery story of dear Hans Christian Andersen's, of the mermaid who was so anxious to win the love of a human being and thereby possess a soul. You remember how it goes—how the old witch, deep down beneath the waters, took her lovely voice in exchange for a pair of feet instead of the fish's tail which she

had possessed aforetime. How she said to her, "You shall dance so gracefully, so exquisitely as nobody on earth is able to do, but every step you take will be as though your feet were being pierced by sharp swords." And the girl mermaid who had seen the young Prince for whose sake she wished to become mortal, gladly accepted the charm, even at such a terrible cost. And then when she danced before the Court the Queen praised her and the King gave her money and riches and the young Prince caused her to sit by his side and she became his favorite companion. But after the manner is of Princes he married with another, and in her anguish the mermaid Princess—of a much older family than the earth Princess mind you—stabbed herself to the heart and floated to the daughters of the air, where after three hundreed years of expiation and good works she might be permitted with all other blessed souls to enter into Paradise.

"What are you thinking of, Miss Betty?" asked he, when they came to a pause in the dance.

"I was thinking," said Betty, "of a nursery tale that would not interest you."

"Tell it to me," he said.

"No," she answered, "I could not tell it to you. I was only recalling one of the stories of my childhood. You see," she said "this is the first time I have danced for more than two years—shall we go on again?"

So they went on again and when the dance had come to an end, he said to her very deferentially, "You will have an ice? Come, everybody does," seeing her hesitate; "it will look so odd if you go straight back to your mother."

"Then I will have an ice," said Betty.

Oh, what a mockery it was. He brought her an ice and champagne cup, and found her a pleasant retired nook where she made a pretence of eating it and he made no pretence of doing anything but letting his eyes feast upon her.

"Do you know," he said presently, "that I am going back to Brussels in two days' time?"

"No," she said with a start, "I did not know it."

"Yes, I shall come to-morrow for the last time. Shall you be at home?"

"I don't know," said Betty.

"Do you think you will be at home?" he persisted.

"I can't say," she replied, although she knew perfectly well that she would not be there.

"Well," he said, speaking in a rough and would-be indifferent, careless sort of way, "I shall come and chance my luck. I may succeed in getting what I want—I may not. At all events I have told you that I am coming."

"Then," said Betty, as she rose to her feet and moved away, "I will make everything as easy for you as I possibly can."

For Betty, the ball was not a success. She danced a great deal, because she was young and fresh, and because her sisters knew every man worth dancing with in the room. Partners she had in plenty, and there was much grumbling at the three initials scrawled so largely upon her programme.

On their return home that night the elder sisters, as was their custom, began to compare programmes and Betty took up Rosa's, astonished to find the word "Southgate" put against two of her dances. In an instant she realized that come what might she neither could nor would reveal to her sister's eyes the initials which the same hand had put against three of her dances.

"Where is yours, Betty?" asked Gwen gayly.

"I think I lost it," cried Betty.

"Or somebody took it," her sister cried laughingly. "Ah, that is a trick the men about here have—like their cheek, I call it." Gwen was rather slangy sometimes in the bosom of her family. "Who got it, do you think, Betty?"

"Oh, I don't think anybody got it; I believe I lost it," said Betty; "I believe I put it somewhere."

She had put it somewhere; she had put it into the bosom of her frock, but that was a detail.

She hid it away, when she reached her own room, with the faded little photograph which had

been her chief consolation in her many hours of loneliness at the Convent of the Sacred Heart.

"Oh, Dick," she cried to herself passionately, as she looked at the three big, bold characters, "Dick, how could you, how could you do it?—Why should you do everything to make me remember the past, which can never be anything but a memory to me? I could not show my programme to Rosa, when you have stolen her heart from her, and seem as if you care no more about breaking it than you did about breaking mine. Oh, Dick, Dick, how could you do it?"

The girl passed another sleepless night and, not unnaturally, was told in the morning by her mother and sisters that she really was not fit for dissipation, and would have to go to bed at eight o'clock if she persisted in looking like this after a single dance.

"I begged you not to let me go, mother," she said with a great effort at cheerfulness; "I was no good there—I didn't know what to say to the men, and a good half of them didn't know what to say

to me. They all thought I was the most stupid little duffer they had ever been condemned to dance with, because of her sisters' popularity, in their lives."

"I thought you got on remarkably well," said Gwen; "I saw you once or twice flirting with Lord Southgate."

"Did you?" said Betty dryly; "I didn't know it."

"My dear, don't you like him any better?" Mrs. McKenzie asked.

"No, mother," she said truthfully enough, "not any better than I did." And then she blushed to think how utterly deceitful she had grown.

"Ah, that's a pity, dear. He danced with you several times, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes," said Betty, "he was very kind to me."

"But he dances beautifully," said Rosa.

"Oh yes, dear, he dances very well," Betty admitted.

During the course of the morning she said to her mother, "Mother, dear, I want to tell you something."

"Yes, darling, what is it?" She was always, poor woman, anxious to have any sign of affection or confidence from this particular daughter.

"Lord Southgate told me last night, mother, that he goes back to Brussels in three days' time, and he is coming this afternoon to say 'Good-bye'—and he did say something about his fate or something of that kind. I don't fancy he has said anything to Rosa, so I thought perhaps you had better know."

"My dear, how good, how very thoughtful and considerate of you—what shall we do? Rosa is difficult—so afraid of seeming to draw men on, or anything of that kind. Gwen, I know, is going somewhere with Captain Johnstone, and do you, darling, go into Blankhampton and match me those embroidery silks that we wanted the other day; you can do any other little shopping that you want, and so keep out of the road, and I will

manage to leave Rosa to receive Lord Southgate alone."

Mrs. McKenzie did manage it; she managed it exceedingly neatly; for, as soon as Gwen and Captain Johnstone were gone, she said to Betty in quite an off-hand tone, "Oh, Betty, dear, I want you to go into Blankhampton for me to-day; if you don't want to walk, dear, take Jenkins in the trap, I must have those embroidery silks. And I want a little marking ink from Glover's and you might just as well look in at Atkinson's and see if they've got that bonnet of mine done, I am really in need of it, and then if there is anything you want in the town, you can get it at the same time."

"I had rather walk, mother," said Betty, taking her cue as she was intended to do.

As soon as Betty had left the house, Mrs. McKenzie turned round to Rosa.

"Rosa dear, I do not feel very well. I sent the child off because I should not like her to see me if I had one of my attacks this afternoon. Do stay with me, Rosa dear."

"Why of course, mother dear, will you come and lie down?"

"I think I'd better do so, dear. It's only a little giddiness, but I feel so nervous if I'm left alone. Yes, I will go up-stairs, I shall be better to be quiet lying down."

Thus she inveigled Rosa up into her bedroom, elaborately laid down on the sofa and went through the whole process of smelling salts and lavender water, and even a tiny dose of sal volatile. And presently, that is to say about an hour afterwards, Parker came upstairs and said that Lord Southgate was in the drawing-room.

"Oh dear, dear, dear," cried Mrs. McKenzie, "I really cannot go down."

"No, of course not, send down a message and say you're not well enough to receive him."

"Oh, but, my dear, he has come to say 'good-bye'," said Mrs. McKenzie, anxiously. "I feel much better, and I shall come down to tea in any case. Go down and talk to him a little, dear child, you know he's going back to Brussels the day after to-morrow."

"You are sure that you'll be all right, dear?"

"Yes, yes, I'll ring my bell for Parker if I feel the least faint or anything," promised Mrs. McKenzie, knowing perfectly well that she was no more likely to feel faint than she was to feel dropsical that particular afternoon.

So Rosa, after a glance at herself in the glass, went down to entertain Lord Southgate and, as Mrs. McKenzie fondly hoped, to decide his fate. But Lord Southgate seemed in no hurry to get the process over. He expressed deep regret that Mrs. McKenzie was not feeling very well, asked after the other members of the family, received with a smile the information that Miss Gwen had gone out with his brother, and then with some diffidence asked whether Miss Betty was out also.

"Yes," said Rosa; "Betty has gone into—well, really, I cannot tell you where she has gone, somewhere for my mother, but I cannot tell you where."

"Oh, really!" He spoke in a tone of the most perfect indifference, not as if it was a matter of any

consequence whether Miss Betty was out at the house or in.

And so they sat for some three-quarters of an hour, talking on subjects most absolutely indifferent to both of them. And about half-past four o'clock, Mrs. McKenzie came down, bland, smiling and sweetly convalescent.

"Oh, nothing, my dear Lord Southgate," she said in reply to his anxious inquiries, "merely a touch of headache. It was nothing, merely a little giddiness and that sort of thing—very unpleasant because I loathe making a scene of any kind, and this dear child here," putting an affectionate hand upon Rosa's shoulder, "made me feel soothed and happy again."

But even the affectionate tone and the affectionate touch of the hand were not enough to make Lord Southgate look anything different to his ordinary appearance, not enough to ruffle or flurry his manner in any way. Mrs. McKenzie's experienced eye told her at once that he had not proposed to her "dear child here."

"You are just going back to Brussels," said she, "dear bright Brussels—I am very fond of the place. I really do not know that I shall not come over this autumn."

"I hope you will," he said eagerly.

"Evidently Rosa hasn't given him a chance," said Mrs. McKenzie to herself, vexedly; "how tiresome she is. I wish it had been Gwen, she would have had it settled long ago."

"You will have a cup of tea," she went on, more blandly still.

"Oh, thanks, yes," said he. He would have taken a cup of petroleum cheerfully at that moment if it would have helped matters on a little.

And then Betty, having spread out her errands to the longest possible time, came in.

"Is that you, dear?" asked her mother.

"Miss Betty," said he getting up and going to meet her.

But there was no response in Betty's beautiful eyes. She gave him her hand listlessly and with a fine air of indifference that deceived him com-

pletely. And presently he went away with a deep glance of reproach such as entered like iron into Betty's bleeding heart.

"My dear mother," said Rosa, as soon as she found herself alone with Mrs. McKenzie, "my dear mother, you never made such a mistake in your life, as when you fancied that Lord Southgate was in love with me. Dear one, he cares no more for me than he cares for Fluffy here," pointing to the Persian, "and you know perfectly well that he can't bear cats."

CHAPTER XV.

THE WAY CLEARS.

Love among mortals
Is but an endless sigh! He longs and endures and stands waiting.
Suffers and yet rejoices, and smiles with tears in his eye.
A. S.

FOR some days Betty waited for some news of her sister's engagement to Lord Southgate, but she waited in vain. He was not mentioned again, except in a casual sort of way and as Captain Johnstone's brother, and Rosa seemed perfectly indifferent on the subject of his absence. At length, she ventured, hesitatingly, and with much dread of herself breaking down, to ask Rosa whether he had proposed to her or not?

Rosa's reply was profoundly disappointing.

"Oh, my dear, don't talk about Lord Southgate

to me; he doesn't care two pence-ha'penny about me. Why should he? He's Frank Johnstone's brother—that's all—he wanted to see Frank, and he didn't care about Blankhampton people, so he came to us. I told mother he didn't mean anything—so foolish of mother to see a prospective son-in-law in every decent-looking man that comes along.

Now, in this remark, which was genuinely meant, poor Betty saw nothing but the indomitable courage of a woman too proud to own that she was in love with a man, who had loved and ridden away. From that day her tenderness to her eldest sister was simply redoubled; she never seemed to tire of waiting upon her and carrying out her smallest wish.

"What a help Betty is to one," Rosa cried one day to her mother. "Upon my word, mother, I never saw such an unselfish girl in my life as she is—do my hair, touch up my frocks, stay at home, go here, go there, do anything that you like, so long as she satisfies other people."

"Yes, she's a dear child—most unselfish," murmured Mrs. McKenzie, in a tone of modest, yet suave appreciation, "and although I know that you girls thought me hard at the time, yet I am sure that the two years she spent at the convent did her no harm so far as her character went."

"She was always a dear child, but she was never so utterly unselfish as she is now. She's unselfish, yes, she certainly is, but she is not happy, you know, mother."

"Not happy? I wonder why not, dear?"

"I don't know," said Rosa, shaking her head, "but she's not happy—I'm sure of it."

"Has she never confided in you?"

"No, not a word. I tried to get it out of her at first, but she would tell me nothing; she only begged me to leave her alone and say nothing about the past whatever."

"Oh," said Mrs. McKenzie, easily, "I have no doubt that now she is out in the world, she sees how foolish she was over that silly affair, and she

is ashamed to think that she could have, so to speak, given herself away to a man that she would not care to know now."

"I thought you told me at the time that he was a gentleman," remarked Rosa, rather dryly.

"Well, he wrote a good hand," said Mrs. McKenzie dubiously.

"Ah, that's quite another matter. I should have thought though," Rosa went on reflectively, "from many little things, that she was suffering from a more poignant trouble than that. After all, when you grow up and feel that you've made a little fool of yourself in your youth, I don't know that it troubles you very much."

"But Betty is too young to brood," said Mrs. McKenzie.

"I don't think so, mother. Remember, that she must have been taught to brood in that dreadful place at Pepinster."

And Mrs. McKenzie did not reply, because she had nothing to say.

The days went merrily over until the middle of

July. Not one word did they hear from Lord Southgate, excepting such as came through his brother, who told Gwen that poor old Dick was very eager to get away from Brussels and seemed to loathe the place as he had never known him do before.

"I think, you know," said he, sapiently to his *fiancée*, "that something or other has gone wrong with old Dick. I don't *know*, of course, because he's not one to confide much in anyone. I think there must have been some woman over there, who has played old Harry with him."

"I shouldn't think so," said Gwen, "nobody would be likely to refuse him."

"You wouldn't have refused him, would you?" said Captain Johnstone.

"Certainly not, if I didn't happen to have seen you first," answered Gwen.

"Ah, but you did happen to see me first," he answered. "But supposing that you *had* seen Dick first and that Dick had taken a fancy to you, what then?"

"Why, then—" said Gwen—"Why, you know what I should have said."

And then, although it was broad daylight and they were walking along a secluded though certainly a public walk, which led from the village beyond the Rosary, by the river's bank to the town, Captain Johnstone put his arm round his *fiancée's* waist and kissed her, regardless of any passers-by who might be coming that way.

"And really," as a lady said indignantly an hour later, in the select company of a villa drawing-room a little further down the road, "the way those girls do go on is a perfect disgrace to the town. Really, Blankhampton used to be a respectable sort of place, but the young ladies who have been —imported into it don't seem to know what *les convénances* are."

"I'm sure the girls that were brought up in it don't," remarked a voice in the corner, "but, of course, that's neither here nor there, Mrs. Rippingham."

Now, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Rippingham's

daughter had been married about six months before, with quite what you might call a flourish of trumpets, and her history since that time had been, to say the least of it, unfortunate. Mrs. Rippingham blushed and said no more.

Well, at Blankhampton they remained living quite a gay sort of life until the middle of July, when Nugent came home from her school in Brussels and they all went off for a month to Queenborough, a charming seaside place, a little over an hour's run from Blankhampton.

"Of course, Nugie," as they called her, "must have a little real change and holiday, and, with this wedding coming on, I am sure it will be a great deal better if Gwen goes too. I daresay Frank will be foolish enough to take a season ticket, but that is his affair," said Mrs. McKenzie laughingly.

And to tell the truth, he was foolish enough to take a season ticket, and as soon as he was released from his duties in attendance on the General as A.D.C. he went over to Queenborough and spent

a great deal of time on the balcony outside the windows of Mrs. McKenzie's pleasant drawing-room, in the company of his charming *fiancée*.

The fashion at Queenborough is to walk up and down, up and down, along a gayly lighted promenade, where a band plays, and everybody wears their newest and smartest clothes. But the betrothed lovers were not often of these. One evening, however, they did happen to be down on the promenade, when Captain Johnstone was stopped by a man whom, apparently, he had not seen since they had been at Eton together.

"Why, Norreys, old chap," he exclaimed, "that can't be you!"

"Why, it's Frankie Johnstone as I live," the stranger exclaimed.

"Yes. I'm A.D.C. to the General in command of this District—I'm in the 110th. What are you doing?"

"Doing? Nothing at all. I tried the sea and I didn't like it, and I tried diplomacy and I didn't like that—hated it, always in a mess about some-

thing or other—and I tried farming and found coal on my land——"

"Why, you don't call that farming, do you?" laughed the soldier.

"No, I don't call it exactly farming, but that was what I began at, you see. I say, old chap, who are you with," said he, looking at the ladies who had walked on.

"Well, I'm with the lady I'm going to be married to in September," said Johnstone, with no little pride in the admission.

"Really, old chap? Well, I must congratulate you. But you aren't going to marry them all, are you?"

"No," said he, "I'm not going to marry them all; I'm going to marry the tallest of the three."

"Oh! Well, you might introduce me to the others; will you?"

"With pleasure."

He took his friend by the arm and followed the three girls along the promenade.

"Rosa, may I introduce my friend Mr. Norreys

to you? Miss McKenzie—Mr. Norreys." Then when the pair had exchanged greetings, Captain Johnstone continued, "And this is Miss Gwen McKenzie—this Miss Betty."

Mr. Norreys made himself excessively agreeable. He walked along between Betty and Rosa, telling them how he had been three days in Queenborough, because he had been told that it was a jolly place to go to; and that he hadn't seen a soul he knew and had never been so wretched in his life. "And," he went on, "I assure you that Johnstone was the very last person in the world I should ever have expected to see, or even to recognize. By the bye, didn't Dick Johnstone come in for the title?"

"Yes, he is Lord Southgate now," said Rosa.

"Do you know him?" Mr. Norreys asked.

"Oh, yes, very well; he was down at Blankhampton for some weeks with his brother; he's not very long been gone back to Brussels. He is Military Attaché there."

"Really, you don't say so. I was in Brussels a

few weeks ago; I would have looked him up if I had known. A good fellow, Dick Johnstone, always was."

"Oh, very charming man," said Miss McKenzie.

Betty could not resist stealing a look at her sister, to see how she could thus unflinchingly speak of the man, to whom they all believed she would have been betrothed long ere this. But Rosa was looking up at the stranger with a smile in her eyes and never a quiver upon her charming lips.

"I wonder if I might come and call upon you?" he said when they were preparing to go in.

"Oh, yes, surely," said Rosa. "My mother is not out on the promenade to-night; she had a little touch of rheumatism and felt that it was safer to keep in. I'm sure she'll be charmed to see you we're always in to tea at five o'clock."

"Then I'll get Captain Johnstone to bring me," he said, in quite a joyous tone.

"Poor thing," said Rosa to Betty as they went along the cliff, "fancy; three days without speak-

ing to a soul; well, he must have been miserable."

"Very, but I daresay he'll be all right now," said Betty indifferently.

And, surely enough, the following afternoon, about five o'clock, Captain Johnstone went into the pretty drawing-room at Cliff Terrace, followed by his old friend, Mr. Norreys. Mrs. McKenzie received him with quite the air of a mother.

"I hear that you have had a most desolate time," she said graciously.

"Oh, an awful time," he replied. "I seriously began to think of taking a shilling dip and never coming up any more. I'm used to loneliness," he went on, in a would-be miserable tone; "I've got a great barrack of a place up in Yorkshire, big enough for half a dozen families, and, as it was just about six times too big for my income to keep up, I was not at all sorry when we discovered coal on the land. I'm now hard at work getting it restored, and when it's all done——"

"Then I suppose you will be thinking about getting married," put in Mrs. McKenzie, in a joking tone.

"Well, I've been thinking about it for some time, but then thinking about it isn't everything, is it?"

"Oh, dear, no. But, just now, don't you think a cup of tea is everything?" she said smiling.

He took the cup of tea and the hint with it, going over to the corner window where Rosa was busy with the tea things, and settled himself down there, with an air as if he meant to stop for the rest of the afternoon.

Well, from that time forward, during the month which followed, Mr. Arthur Norreys remained in Queenborough,—remained, moreover, as *the* most intimate friend that "those girls" possessed, although there were many other men whom they knew in the gay and fashionable watering-place. And at the end of the month, or rather a few days before the end of it, he found his way one afternoon to their rooms, and at a time when he knew that Mrs. McKenzie would be resting after lunch.

"Mrs. McKenzie," he said "I've come to ask you a plain and straightforward question."

"Then, my dear sir," said she, "you shall have a plain and straightforward answer."

"Thank you," said he. "My question is this: may I marry your eldest daughter?"

"Yes, if my eldest daughter will marry you," she replied, "and you will show me that you can provide for her in at least as good a way as she has been accustomed to live."

"My dear Mrs. McKenzie," said he, holding out a broad and honest hand, "I will tell you everything there is to know about me. At present my coal mines are bringing me in something like eight thousand a year, with care and moderate living, they can be made to bring in anything between sixteen and sixty thousand. My family is, as you must know already, a very old and honorable one; I have no relations, except some distant cousins; and although I am a plain-speaking man, not given to flowery language or anything of that kind, I would lay down my life for the woman I loved."

"Which is Rosa?" said she kindly.

"Yes," he replied, "which is Rosa."

CHAPTER XVI.

ONLY A TOUCH.

"Explanations are waste of time. A man who can see understands a touch."

I NEED not say that great was the surprise of all the others when they came in an hour or so later, very keen on tea and tea-cakes and apparently not at all expecting any such end to their visit to Queenborough. But they were all very nice to Norreys, and Rosa herself looked so radiantly happy, as did the prospective bridegroom, that nobody could doubt that the engagement was one of great mutual affection.

To Betty, however, it came with a terrible shock, and that evening after they had spent a couple of

hours on the Promenade, listening to the band, and the two young men had bidden their respective sweethearts good-night, she crept quietly into Rosa's room and told her that she had come specially to wish her all the happiness in the world.

"But, Rosey," she said, when Rosa had kissed her and thanked her for her kind thoughts, "what will Lord Southgate say?"

"Lord Southgate, my dear," repeated Rosa. "Oh, you're not thinking about that! My dear child, as I always told mother, Lord Southgate had no more notion of marrying me than he had of marrying the man in the moon. His brother was desperately in love with Gwen, and as he was staying with his brother, and, naturally enough, he came to see us, but as for marrying *me*, I give you my word of honor, Betty, that he never uttered one word to me which might not have been shouted aloud from the very housetops. Don't worry your dear tender heart by imagining that Lord Southgate is going to die of a broken heart on my account." Rosa went on playfully: "He was a very nice man

and I liked him very well, and, of course, it was a certain satisfaction to feel that we always had him about with us, and so to let those charming people in Blankhampton see that 'those girls,' as they always called us, could get the best and keep them from them. Very mean, I know, but then——! As for marrying Lord Southgate," she went on, "I would just as soon have thought of marrying him, as he would have thought of marrying me. But go to bed, ducky, and get to sleep and be ready in the morning to help me to plan out how I can get my things ready to be married on the same day as dear old Gwen."

"The end of September," said Betty.

"Yes, the end of September," answered Rosa, half shyly.

And Betty obediently went to bed, but not to sleep, no, to lie awake all night thinking over those past few cruel months, when she had resolutely crushed down her heart for the sake of the sister, who had always been the tenderest and dearest of sisters to her when she had made one great self-

sacrifice that had never been needed either for her sake or for his.

Sleep! Why, never a wink of sleep came near those great gray eyes that warm August night. She laid awake in her bed thinking and thinking, and in the gray faint light, while Nugent was still asleep, she got up and sat by her window watching the world, which had become, in a single moment, a new world to her. Oh, how cruel he must have thought her, he that had no other thought than for her, he who had probably made himself intimate with the family at the Rosary only that he might hear news of her. She knew it, she was convinced of it now, and she had sacrificed him utterly and entirely. She had just something of a doubt in her mind, as to whether a man of his proud and imperious temper would be likely to forgive her. He was coming from Brussels to be best man to his brother, and she would naturally be the chief bridesmaid. Would he then refuse to "let the dead past bury its dead" or would he understand that she too had suffered a perfect mar-

tyrdom of pain? Well, that was a matter that only time could show.

They returned a few days later to Blankhampton and Mr. Norreys took up his quarters in the principal hotel, the one at which Lord Southgate had stayed at, and, as Mrs. McKenzie pathetically put it to her friends, made life a perfect burden to her.

"Here we are," she said, "in but the middle of August and really and truly, I don't know how the poor young man will exist for another six weeks. As for Rosy, poor child, she cannot get her dresses tried on, choose her linen, and barely has time to admire the presents with which he loads her. Oh, it is a dreadful time! It is a real trial to have a young couple so excessively in love with each other as these two are."

However, in due time, Captain the Honorable Frank Johnstone spared time from his staff duties and from those duties which were not pertaining to the staff, to write to his brother in Brussels:

"DEAR OLD CHAP,—The wedding was fixed for September 28th. Remember, you promised to be my best man and see me turned off in a manner creditable to the family. When I say 'weddings' I am *not* joking. You remember Arthur Norreys at Eton, of course—well, he tried sailoring and didn't like it, and he tried diplomatic work and didn't like that, and he tried farming—his own land, you know—and didn't seem to do much good at that. However, he struck ile—or to be correct, coal—at that rambling old place of his down in Yorkshire and he now has about eight thousand a year. I met him at Queenborough quite by chance, introduced him to the McKenzies and he caught on with them like a paraffin lamp or anything else inflammable you like, and almost before you could turn yourself round or say Jack Robinson, he and Rosey had made a match of it. They are the spooniest couple I ever saw in my life. Gwen and I have always been reasonable, but upon my word this chap—he's awful, and she's awful too; and I think poor old Mrs. McKenzie will really be glad

when the ceremony is over and they are safely out of the house. They are going to be married on the same day as we are; so, old chap, you'll have to fork out two wedding presents instead of one. You asked me in your last letter for news of the McKenzie family. Well, I have sent you all the news there is, except that Betty isn't looking so preternaturally solemn as she generally does. Let me hear from you for certain when you are coming, and that the date suits you, and

"Believe me

"Your affectionate brother

"FRANK."

In reply to this Lord Southgate wrote, saying that he was to be released from his duties at Brussels during the week previous to the date fixed for the weddings, so that it would suit him perfectly, and he would be sure to be there in time with proper and suitable presents. "You might find out for me, dear old chap, what your future wife wishes to have—it'll have to be jewelry of course."

I scarcely know how to tell my tale further. Lord Southgate went down to Blankhampton the day previous to the wedding, heavy at heart and sick with hope deferred. You see he, poor fellow, had no notion that Betty had sacrificed him against every dictate of her own heart, for the sake of the sister she loved.

He dined at the Rosary that evening, together with the two bridegrooms, the other best man, Sir John Netherdale, and a good-natured youngster from the barracks. And, though he took Mrs. McKenzie in to dinner, she talked a good deal to Sir John Netherdale and he found himself next to Gwen's chief bridesmaid, a slight and pretty girl, who was more than willing to talk her best and smartest to the handsome young nobleman, who had gained the reputation during the past few months in Blankhampton, of not being very easy to interest. She did not find him particularly easy to get on with that evening, but he talked to her gravely and with the ease of a man moving in good society, because, though she little knew it,

by turning his head to speak to her, he had the chance of looking at Betty, who was sitting at the farther end of the other side of the table.

But in vain did he try to catch Betty's eyes. He only succeeded in doing so once and then, she immediately cast them down again with a blush so vivid, that an answering flame of fire seemed to shoot right through his sore and hopeless heart. What did it mean—why should she blush like that? During the few times that he had seen her, both alone and in the presence of others, he had never succeeded in raising the color to her cheeks, rather in driving it away from them. Yet, try as he would, he could not make her look again, not even when he opened the door for the ladies and she passed out in the wake of her sister's train.

He went back to the table puzzled and wondering what on earth it could mean? The girl's whole manner was changed, all the defiance, all the bitterness, all the resentment, all the suppressed anger seemed to have melted out of voice and face and manner. What did it mean?

However, he did not find out that evening. Betty sang and she played, and then they all danced, but she did not dance with him; somehow she seemed to elude his grasp like a Will-o'-the-wisp, and he went back to his hotel more puzzled, and I must own, more in love than he had ever been in his life before.

The wedding day was fair and lovely, the church in which the ceremony took place was crammed with people although it was supposed to be the empty season for Blankhampton. Captain Johnstone was fidgety and got off to church in what he called rattling good time, but, early as he was, the other bridegroom was earlier still. And while the two victims of the day were looking round at monumental slabs and stained windows, Mr. Norreys' best man came up to Lord Southgate and and said, "Don't you think we've brought our men too soon?"

"Yes, I do," said Lord Southgate, "ten minutes too soon, and all these people haven't the faintest idea whether you and I are the bridegrooms or whether the other two chaps are."

However, a wedding is generally more interesting before than it is just after the ceremony, and Lord Southgate and his fellow best man amused themselves by standing just below the chancel-steps, watching the company arrive—the congregation, perhaps I ought to say.

And presently Mrs. McKenzie sailed up the aisle, convoyed by Sir John Netherdale. The two brides were to be given away by McKenzie uncles; one Sir Amyas McKenzie, and the other General McPherson McKenzie. But, long before their arrival, Lord Southgate had caught a glimpse of Betty's charming face under a big black hat with some touches of turquoise blue at the side thereof. There seemed to him about a dozen girls waiting at the west end of the Church; then there was a hush, a stir, and the two brides came in, passed through their train of bridesmaids and paced slowly up the church.

It was soon over. Lord Southgate held his brother's hat and his gloves, and Betty took Rosa's bouquet and other paraphernalia, while the

girl who had sat next to Lord Southgate the previous evening at dinner performed the same office for Gwen. Then there was the dreadful period of waiting, while the registers were being signed, when Lord Southgate found himself very near to Betty in the vestry and relieved her of one of the bouquets which it was her duty to hold.

Then when the bells set up a merry peal and the organ boomed forth the "Dead March in Saul"—no, no, I don't mean the "Dead March in Saul," the other thing, the "Wedding March"—Lord Southgate gave Betty his arm in the most natural manner in the world, and they started off down the aisle in the wake of the principal actors of the day.

Did you ever hear, dear reader, of a proposal being made and accepted by the help of one single word? They had got about half-way down the church, this pair, when Lord Southgate fancied that he felt Betty's little hand tremble on his arm. It might have been but the merest fancy,

but he looked down upon her and said, in a very low voice, "Betty."

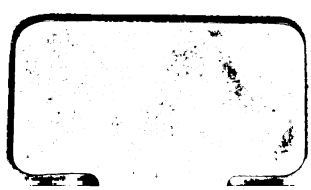
And Betty looked up at him with something suspiciously like tears in her eyes, and so the chasm between them came to an end, and was closed up altogether forever.

* * * * * * *

Oh, yes, there were explanations afterwards, explanations though, which only made Lord Southgate more utterly and irretrievably in love with his sweetheart than he had ever been before.

"And Dick," said Betty, just before they went back to the world again, "will you do me a favor? Will you never let them know that you were the man who wrote me that letter in Brussels? It cost me very dear, that letter, but I would like to keep the whole of the episode a dead secret between you and me, a chapter in our lives known only to ourselves. I could not bear to hear mother, dear and good as she has been

ever since I came home—explaining things away to you. I think, Dick," she went on in her sweet, sad tones, "that it will take us years to get over that awful time."

"Years!" he replied joyously—"not a bit of it—when once you are my very own, it will not take years, no nor months, nor weeks, nor even days—hours, dearest; only hours, my loved one."

THE END.